

GIVE ME A *HAND*... AS WE DANCE WITH THE DRAGON:

FINE TUNING THE ASIA-PACIFIC HANDS CONCEPT

by

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Approval

The undersigned certify that this thesis meets master's-level standards of research, argumentation, and expression.

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Disclaimer

The conclusions and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author. They do not reflect the official position of the U.S. Government, Department of Defense, the United States Air Force, or Air University.

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As with any rigorous program, a toll must be paid and the SAASS experience has been no different. However, the cost of the toll has risen dramatically over the years reaching its peak in the academic years of 2014-2015. My toll has been two-fold, my wife and kids on one hand, and my hard nosed, prior Marine father on the other.

I write this as my father fights Grade Four Glioblastoma—terminal brain cancer. The battle began on 3 December 2014 when a doctor notified him that he would have a 20 percent chance of surviving beyond November of 2015. My first reaction was to head home and help; his first reaction was to tell me to buckle down and concentrate on school—a reminder of a common theme I often heard growing up. His battle continues and I dedicate this thesis to him.

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Abstract

Over the last thirteen years of conflict, Operation ENDURING FREEDOM has forced the U.S. to operate in a culturally diverse and challenging environment. Unfortunately, those experiences demonstrated that our operators and strategic decision makers were poorly equipped to understand and operate effectively within foreign cultures and societies. In turn, their struggle solidified the importance of cross-cultural and regional competence within the profession of arms, and Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture (LREC) has now become a top priority for our military.¹ The first product of this realization was the Afghanistan-Pakistan (AfPak) Hands program established in 2009. Announced as a high-priority program that would ‘change the paradigm’ of employment within a culturally diverse arena, it called for the development of ‘a cohort of experts who speak the local language, are culturally attuned, and are focused on the problem for an extended period of time.’² The second product, an offshoot of the first, is in conjunction with the Department of Defense’s (DoD) strategic focus pivoting from Europe and the Middle East to the Asia-Pacific. In December 2013, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) published the *Asia-Pacific Hands Program* memorandum, which called for the development of a “Hands-like program focused on the Asia-Pacific (APAC) region.”³ The Chairman stated, “Future commanders of our force will need deep regional understanding to execute their missions, starting in the Phase Zero shaping environment. I remain convinced that we must arm our operators at all levels with deep personal and professional regional expertise.” Doing so, the Chairman intends to take a proactive approach in the strategic development of cultural and regional awareness by capitalizing on lessons from the past 10 years of conflict and the evolving Hands program. He ends by asking the Service Chiefs to look at how to implement and expose this new concept. This essay attempts to look at the Hands’ programs of the past and present to pull relevant and instructive lessons to assist in the refinement, understanding, and development of the Chairman’s Asia-Pacific Hands concept.

¹ William D. Wunderle and Combat Studies Institute (U.S.), *Through the Lens of Cultural Awareness: A Primer for US Armed Forces Deploying to Arab and Middle Eastern Countries* (Fort Leavenworth, KS; Washington, DC: Combat Studies Institute Press ; For sale by the Supt. of Docs., U.S. G.P.O., 2006).

² Brannen Cohee and Taylor Wilkinson, *Research and Analysis Project for Afghanistan-Pakistan Hands - Cohort 1*, UNCLASSIFIED//FOUO (Joint Staff J5 Pakistan-Afghanistan Coordination Cell: AFPAK Hands Management Element: NDU Center for Complex Operations, March 19, 2012), 9.

³ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) CM-0301-13, “Asia-Pacific Hands Program” (US Joint Staff, December 5, 2013).

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Chapter 1

Introduction

We cannot live only for ourselves. A thousand fibers connect us with our fellow-men; and among those fibers, as sympathetic threads, our actions run as causes, and they come back to us as effects.

~ Herman Melville, American Novelist

The United States has sought to embrace those fibers mentioned above and build lasting relationships with foreign nations. It has done so in the name of national security since the interwar period and the reformation of the U.S. Department of State in 1924. The U.S. realized early on that international relationships were critical to national security and that its future was inextricably linked to foreign nations in a quest for global security. Unfortunately since the Second World War in which the U.S. arose as a global hegemon, the importance of the U.S. embracing the unique cultures of our partner nations has subsided. Put another way, U.S. policy and budget decisions have seemed to reflect that cultural awareness and sensitivity were lower priorities, which made foreign involvement more difficult. Eventually, it was clear to senior policy makers that a change was required.

Operating within a foreign culture is extremely dynamic and difficult when you fail to understand the men and women you are fighting for, with, or against in battle. David Hume claimed, “As force is always on the side of the governed...the governors have nothing to support them but opinion...[therefore] persuasion, not force itself, must ultimately govern, because no ruling minority can control a truly aroused majority.”¹ Thus, public opinion matters, and the only way to have a positive influence on the minds of men and women is to understand, embrace and sympathize with their culture—the beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols of those who call the area of employment home. When analyzing Hume’s words, John Shy wrote, “human beings do not kill and risk death for no reason. Beneath the raw irrationality of violence lies motive—some psychic

¹ John W. Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for American Independence*, Rev. ed, Ann Arbor Paperbacks 2A (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 165.

web spun from logic, belief, perception, and emotion.”² Nine years into the Afghan conflict, the U.S. began to turn the corner and embrace the cultural fibers that connect and motivate people to act within their environment—their culture. They did it by resurrecting the Hands program and employing it within an ongoing war.

Research Focus and Question

The Afghanistan-Pakistan (AfPak) Hands program infused culture into strategy. Its cultural focus produced individuals specially trained in the language, regional expertise, and culture (LREC) of Afghanistan and Pakistan. The program was designed to produce paradigm-shifting support to President Obama’s updated strategy in Afghanistan. Nearly 14 years later, the war continues and the Hands are still dispersed throughout the country as advisors at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels of war. As operations slow in Afghanistan, U.S. officials are shifting their strategic focus to the Asia-Pacific region and with that shift comes another Hands program—the Asia-Pacific (APAC) Hands.

The Chairman, in a memorandum to the Services, announced the APAC program in December 2013 as a concept that will support U.S. and Allied efforts in the Asia-Pacific. The guidance was vague and without actionable details, but he asked for the support of the Services while “intelligently developing Asia-Pacific Hands...the next generation of commanders.”³ Since the December announcement, the program has largely lost energy within the Joint Staff and subsequently the Service components—we must revive the APAC conversation and regain its momentum. This leads to the heart of this thesis and its research question: What instructive lessons from the previous Hands programs can assist in the refinement, understanding, and development of the Chairman’s Asia-Pacific Hands concept?

² Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed*, 165.

³ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) CM-0301-13, “CM-0301-13.”

Research Methodology and Framework

Change is difficult; in large organizations it becomes even harder. Building an effective APAC Hands program requires innovative thinking; because it involves a radical organizational change, Stephen Rosen's book, *Winning The Next War*, can be instructive. The book highlighted the fact that bureaucracies are highly resistant to change, and "military bureaucracies, moreover, are especially resistant to change."⁴ However, according to Rosen military innovation and change can succeed under the right conditions; he argued: "Bureaucracies do innovate, however, even military ones, and the question thus becomes not whether but *why* and *how* they can change."⁵ Using this essay, I hope to provide clarity and direction to the *why* and *how* the military can successfully develop APAC Hands. Moreover, this essay seeks to provide a way forward, by distilling tangible lessons from past programs for use by the Chairman and his staff in the development and management of a future Hands program. The essay will examine the complexity of the contemporary program and its predecessor using a variety of primary and secondary sources. The focus will be on the LREC objectives of the programs as well as their regional employment model. Through this endeavor, I hope to glean key insight in to best practices and shortfalls of the AfPak Hands program and identify those lessons to assist in the development of the APAC Hands program.

Overview of Chapters

Culture is important, but it is also nebulous. There have been many books written to define the term. The wicked problem that plagues cultural understanding is that culture means different things to different people; it also changes over time—it evolves. So what is culture and why is it important? Chapter Two answers these questions in addition to connecting the topic of culture with strategy. It selects a working definition of culture that is applicable to the Department of Defense (DoD) and argues culture and strategy are an imperative duo—inseparable—driving home the importance of cultural understanding within the art of strategy. Thus, a program that embraces and specializes

⁴ Stephen Peter Rosen, *Winning the next War Innovation and the Modern Military*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca [u.a.]: Cornell Univ. Press, 1991), 2.

⁵ Rosen, *Winning the next War Innovation and the Modern Military*, 3.

in the Language, Regional Expertise, and Cultural Competence of our global partners is essential in today's strategic environment. The Chairman and his staff realized this in the midst of a conflict that has taken place in a culturally complex environment—Afghanistan.

Since the beginning of the conflict in Afghanistan and neighboring Pakistan, the U.S. has sought to hunt and kill the terrorists who use those countries as a sanctuary. As such, in September 2001 President George Bush stated to Congress and the world, “The Taliban must act, and act immediately. They will hand over the terrorists or they will share in their fate.”⁶ Weeks later, in October, combat operations commenced in one of the most culturally and geographically complex regions in the world, and they continue today. Chapter Three dives into the complexity of the region in which the U.S. and Coalition forces have struggled to make lasting headway. Afghanistan and Pakistan house over 40 unique languages that span a combined population of nearly 230 million people and a half million square miles; the task of becoming culturally competent is enormous. To this end, the U.S. instituted an Afghanistan-Pakistan Hands (AfPak) Program, which is “designed to deepen our understanding of the regional culture, language, and history, including the complicated relationships among tribes and the Afghan and Pakistani governments, and to be sensitive to the nuances that define those relationships.”⁷

Overviews of the past and present Hands programs comprise Chapter Four. The Old China Hands program from the interwar period is the empirical and proactive model for the present program. Its purpose was to understand as well as influence Chinese officials and their people during the Second World War. The AfPak Hands program is the contemporary and reactive ancestor of its predecessor. The two programs, China and AfPak, contain instructive lessons for future programs such as the Chairman's Asia-Pacific (APAC) Hands program. The chapter is primarily focused on the LREC training and employment of programs as well on complementary DoD programs such as the Joint Foreign Area Officer (FAO) program. It further examines initiatives to assess the level

⁶ Steve Bowman and Catherine Dale, *War in Afghanistan: Strategy, Military Operations, and Issues for Congress*, Congressional Research Service (Congressional Research Service, December 3, 2009), <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/133925.pdf>, 7.

⁷ Stavridis, “Teaching the Ropes.”

of LREC proficiency of the individual Hand or FAO. For either program to succeed, it must be effectively employed which requires scoping or defining the region for employment.

Chapter Five confronts the problem of bounding cultures into a defined region for employment. At the center of the struggle to become culturally competent is the ambiguity of a regional definition, specifically a definition of the Asia-Pacific region. The strategic effectiveness of the U.S. in the Asia-Pacific region depends upon the relationships with Asian allies and key Pacific partners; fostering those relationships and alliances is “critical to the future stability and growth of the region.”⁸ On one hand, geographically, the Asia-Pacific is extremely large—40 countries spread over 80 million square miles. On the other, culturally, it is equally vast and diverse—3 thousand unique languages among 4 billion people. To embrace a region of this size fully is a monumental task. It requires significant effort and investment; therefore, realistically scoping, or defining, a region into logical sub-regions and prioritizing those regions based on strategic importance will better enable a Hands program to become culturally attuned with an area as enormous as the Asia-Pacific.

Reviewing and refining the Chairman’s concept for the APAC Hands program is the motive of this essay and is what makes up Chapter Six. This chapter provides six instructive lessons taken from the two previous generations of Hands. By accounting for the former and current programs, this essay seeks to project these lessons forward in order to develop meaningful guidelines for the future and for building a regional Hands program.

Nearly 14 years of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM has forced the U.S. to operate in a culturally diverse and challenging environment. Those experiences demonstrated that our operators and strategic decision makers were poorly equipped to understand and operate effectively within foreign cultures and societies. Their struggle solidified the importance of cross-cultural and regional competence within the profession of arms, and Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture (LREC) has now become a top

⁸ Department of Defense (DoD), “Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense” (Department of Defense (DoD), January 2012), http://www.defense.gov/news/Defense_Strategic_Guidance.pdf, 2.

priority for our military.⁹ Building international relationships and embracing the cultural fibers that connect all of us is critical to security at home and abroad; however, lasting peace and security do not readily appear from the military force alone. Rather, peace comes with understanding and interaction. Enduring success in foreign lands will be a product of employing the right people, with the right training, at the right time, to the right area. Admiral James Stavridis aptly stated,

If the past decade of persistent conflict has taught us anything, it is that ignorance and lies are the greatest enemies and the most relevant threats to our national security and to the security and prosperity of the world. These threats loom largest today not on the fields of battle or in hostile territory, as enemies did in wars past, but in the human mind. We must become deft warriors in a volatile intellectual market. In the present climate we must influence, not control; convince, not coerce; inspire, not rebuke; and we must launch better ideas than those promulgated by our foes.¹⁰

As the U.S. strategic focus pivots to the Asia-Pacific, and we prepare to dance with the dragon for regional security, the lessons of the Hands—past and present—are extremely relevant to that of the future—the Asia-Pacific Hands program.

⁹ William D. Wunderle and Combat Studies Institute (U.S.), *Through the Lens of Cultural Awareness: A Primer for US Armed Forces Deploying to Arab and Middle Eastern Countries* (Fort Leavenworth, KS; Washington, DC: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2006).

¹⁰ Stavridis, “Teaching the Ropes.”

Chapter 2

Solidifying the Need for Cultural Understanding in Strategy

...in the 21st century, military strength will be measured not by the weapons our troops carry, but by the languages they speak and cultures they understand.

~ President Barack Obama

The importance of understanding the various cultures contained in the world has gained traction through 14 years of protracted war in the culturally diverse arena of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. Even though many senior military and government leaders recognize the importance of a culturally astute force, the idea has been slow to catch on. The sluggishness is largely due to the difficult task of understanding and articulating what culture means and how it integrates into military strategy.

Culture ... An Elusive Definition

The idea of culture seems easy enough, until one tries to articulate a working definition. If I were to ask ten different people what culture means to them, in return, I would most likely get ten different answers. Understanding culture is a difficult task because the definition incorporates many elements, such as history, social norms or traits, geography, language, region, race, religion, music, agriculture, etc. The list could go on; it could also include the thoughts, actions, and feelings of people in a variety of situations. To make the understanding of culture even more elusive, it may even include elements of human psychology, sociology, or anthropology.¹ All of this leads us to a difficult reality—the definition of culture is very nebulous, overwhelming, and can vary drastically from person to person. The point is that culture is a difficult subject to tackle, and, because it is so amorphous, definitions matter, as does the clarity and refinement of those definitions. Let us look at some of the various definitions and then narrow them down to one that is usable for the purpose of this essay.

¹ Brooks Peterson, *Cultural Intelligence: A Guide to Working with People from Other Cultures* (Yarmouth, Me: Intercultural Press, 2004).

Establishing a Definition ... So What Is Culture?

The definition of culture is largely in the eyes of the beholder. It is “the rules for living and functioning in society” and, “because the rules differ from culture to culture, in order to function and be effective in a particular culture, you need to know how to ‘play by the rules.’”² While cultural differences are always present, there are some common characteristics in many of the definitions of culture that provide a helpful point from which to begin. Some of the commonalities of culture include the values, beliefs, behaviors, and customs found in a group of individuals.

The understanding of culture is a moving target; it does not stop with an established definition. Spitzberg and Changnon claimed culture is “enduring yet evolving intergenerational attitudes, values, beliefs, rituals/customs, and behavioral patterns into which people are born but that is structurally created and maintained by people’s ongoing actions.”³ Structural Theory is the premise that an individual’s behavior and his or her social structure are intertwined and evolve through socialization. They explained, “People go through a socialization process and become dependent [on] the existing social structures, but at the same time social structures are being altered by their activities.”⁴ In other words, social structures change based on the interactions and activities individuals and groups experience. Therefore, one—a strategist especially—must understand that culture is dynamic; it evolves with exposure, socialization, technology, and diffusion.⁵ To properly understand and effectively interact within an established culture, one must stay flexible, learn, and adjust one’s understanding or definition as necessary to the application.

For the purpose of this essay, culture is best defined as “fundamental to all aspects of human existence; culture shapes the way humans view life and functions as a tool we use to adapt to our social and physical environments. A culture is the sum of all the beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning for a society. All human

² Larry A. Samovar, Richard E. Porter, and Edwin R. McDaniel, eds., *Intercultural Communication: A Reader*, 13th ed (Boston, Mass: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2012).

³ Darla K. Deardorff, ed., *The Sage Handbook of Intercultural Competence* (Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications, 2009).

⁴ “Structural Theory,” Education, *University of Twente*, (November 26, 2014), http://www.utwente.nl/cw/theorieenoverzicht/Theory%20clusters/Organizational%20Communication/Structural_Theory/.

⁵ Samovar, Porter, and McDaniel, *Intercultural Communication*, 12.

beings have culture, and individuals within a culture share a general set of beliefs and values.”⁶ Now that we have a definition and general understanding of what culture is, we must use it to gain the knowledge, skill, and personal attributes to operate effectively within a culturally diverse environment. The knowledge gained assists while interacting with people from different cultures at home and abroad, otherwise known as Cross-Cultural Competence (3C).⁷

3C is the “ability to quickly and accurately comprehend, and then appropriately and effectively engage, individuals from distinct cultural backgrounds to achieve the desired effect.”⁸ This ability is easily taken for granted by Americans in general due to their geographic separation and isolationist upbringing on the international stage. For the most part, Americans lack 3C unlike their landlocked and culturally rich allies in Western Europe where it is common to be fluent in multiple languages and cultures. Americans and U.S. military members in particular need these 3C skills when working with people from other nations. Developing 3C aids in “discerning the meaning of behaviors of those who are different and promoting effective and enduring partnerships with them.”⁹ Establishing a definition of culture, its applications and understanding that it evolves through social interaction are foundational for operations within a culturally diverse environment, but there is also a relationship between culture and strategy.

Culture + Strategy ... An Imperative Duo

When we speak of destroying the enemy's forces we must emphasize that nothing obliges us to limit this idea to physical forces: the moral element must also be considered. The two interact throughout: they are inseparable . . . the moral factor is, so to speak, the most fluid element of all, and therefore spreads most easily to affect everything else.

~ Carl von Clausewitz

The relationship between culture and strategy is complex, ever-evolving, and long-term. Military strategy is the plan to use military power to achieve a political goal;

⁶ Air Force Culture & Language Center, “Expeditionary Culture Field Guide: Afghanistan” (US Air Force, n.d.), <http://culture.af.mil>.

⁷ Sands, *Cross-Cultural Competence for a Twenty-First-Century Military*, 34.

⁸ Brian Selmeski, “Military Cross-Cultural Competence: Core Concepts and Individual Development” (Royal Military College of Canada Center for Security, Armed Forces & Society Occasional Paper Series-Number 1, May 16, 2007).

⁹ Sands, *Cross-Cultural Competence for a Twenty-First-Century Military*, xxii.

it provides a theory to achieve success.¹⁰ Culture is independent of the strategy, but a successful strategy—throughout all phases of operations—should be dependent upon the knowledge and understanding of the relevant cultures in the operating environment. Conflicts have arisen from the motives of men—Fear, Honor, Interest—long before Thucydides recorded his *History of the Peloponnesian War*, and they have continued long after his death, and they continue today.¹¹ Around the same period as Thucydides, Sun Tzu also wrote about the importance of knowing your opponent: “know the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril.”¹² He emphasized that a strategist must also know oneself: “When you are ignorant of the enemy but know yourself, your chances of winning or losing are equal...if ignorant both of your enemy and of yourself, you are certain in every battle to be in peril.”¹³ If you merge the theories together, they highlight the essence of interplay between cultural competence and strategy. Conflict at its most basic level is between peoples “who on one hand share universal tendencies, and on the other hand bring distinct tradition, beliefs, and values” to every situation.¹⁴

The human element of conflict weighs heavily in the decision to wage war. Clausewitz claimed war is a social interaction; it “is never directed against material force alone; it is always aimed simultaneously at the moral forces which give it life, and the two cannot be separated.”¹⁵ Slessor added, “War is a human activity.”¹⁶ Thucydides’ trinity highlights the human factors that dominate national political decision-making and which may compel leadership to seek war for self-preservation, national principle or economic interest.¹⁷

The military enterprise must be able to strategize and operate worldwide at a moment’s notice while accounting for the human factor of war. Military strategists must build a strategy with “sufficient and relevant understanding [of culture] to craft and adapt

¹⁰ Richard Rousseau, “Strategic Perspectives: Clausewitz, Sun-Tzu and Thucydides,” *Khazar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 15, no. 2 (2012): 74–85, doi:10.5782/2223-2621.2012.15.2.74.

¹¹ Thucydides., Robert B. Strassler, and Richard Crawley, *The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 43.

¹² Sun Tzu, *The Illustrated Art of War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005)., 125.

¹³ Sun Tzu, *The Illustrated Art of War*, 125.

¹⁴ Sands, *Cross-Cultural Competence for a Twenty-First-Century Military*, xxii.

¹⁵ Clausewitz, *On War*, 149 & 137.

¹⁶ John Cotesworth Slessor, *Air Power and Armies* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009), 17.

¹⁷ J.F.C. Fuller, *The Foundations of the Science of War* (www.militarybookshop.co.uk, 3 Jan 12), 66.

strategy to the realities on the ground.”¹⁸ A recent study by the RAND Corporation claimed, “Just as important as the need to develop an understanding of the human, political, and sociocultural aspects of a conflict is the ability to place knowledge in historical context and use history as a guide to understanding. Without a collective and comprehensive understanding of what happened previously, there is little chance of developing an appropriate approach to new challenges.”¹⁹ Human activity penetrates every aspect of war from the national strategic decision to go to war to the operational art that plans the campaign, down to the violent clash of physical forces between opponents during battle, and the eventual reconstruction afterwards.²⁰ Helmuth Von Moltke succinctly articulated that rarely does strategy survive with any certainty beyond the first contact with the enemy.²¹ Therefore, much like culture, strategy will evolve with socialization and requires continuous evaluation and adjustment.

As culture evolves through interaction, so does the strategy that is inclusive of culture. This interdependence makes it extremely difficult to measure. The inclusion of culture within strategy is a long-term venture; it consists of building long-term, complex relationships that must be nurtured and adjusted over time to maximize success. It highlights the difference between the measurements of performance and effectiveness. Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster noted, ‘It is difficult to overstate the importance of constant reassessment. The nature of a conflict will continue to evolve because of continuous interaction with enemies and other destabilizing factors. Progress will never be linear, and there will have to be constant refinement and readjustments to even the best plans.’²² In the same vein, a proactive approach to culture and strategy will be more effective than a reactive one. Cultural competence is dangerous if ignored or allowed to atrophy within the profession of arms. Not accounting for cultural context prior to executing a military operation or strategy will immediately place the operators at a disadvantage and potentially leave them hoping it is not too late to acquire it. The road to cultural competence is time-consuming, as seen over the last 13 years in Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, and includes language, regional expertise and culture (LREC).

¹⁸ Linda Robinson et al., *Improving Strategic Competence: Lessons from 13 Years of War*, 2014, 61.

¹⁹ Robinson et al., *Improving Strategic Competence*, 61-62.

²⁰ *The Evolution of Soviet operational art, 1927-1991: the documentary basis* (London; Portland, Ore.: Frank Cass, 1995), 54.

²¹ Helmuth Moltke and Daniel J. Hughes, *Moltke on the Art of War: Selected Writings* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1995), 45.

²² Robinson et al., *Improving Strategic Competence*, 62.

It, like any other finely tuned precision weapon, takes time to develop and acquire before employment; a proactive strategy to understanding “people and behavior have become as important to consider as weapon platforms” in today’s operating environment.²³

Cultural Missteps ... Why They Matter

The human dimension of war and strategy has a way of triumphing over technology and cunning plans.

~ Colin S. Gray

The first question a strategist should ask prior to the development of a plan of action is, “*How well do I know my adversary?*” Knowing the adversary and the environment can minimize potential strategic missteps, which could compromise the mission at hand. As Thucydides stated in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*, this reality is often forgotten at the onset of war: “When people are entering upon a war they do things the wrong way around. Action comes first, and it is only when they have already suffered that they begin to think.”²⁴ This was again the case after war broke out in Afghanistan in 2001.

The stories of cultural missteps, whether intentional or not, abound, and for the Coalition forces fighting in Afghanistan, it was a difficult concept to grasp without proper training. The use of military working canines is a prime example of how a Western norm does not translate in the Islamic culture of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Dogs are commonly disliked and considered unclean and impure animals. To bring a canine in the home or a mosque of a Muslim would be completely unacceptable and often times disgraceful. Without previous experience or cultural study, one would not know that “a dislike for dogs may also stem from long-held cultural traditions across the Middle East and South Asia that likely influenced Muhammad and his followers.” Many Muslims are taught from a young age that “touching a dog makes you dirty...so that you should not

²³ Sands, *Cross-Cultural Competence for a Twenty-First-Century Military*, 11.

²⁴ Montgomery McFate, “Does Culture Matter? The Military Utility of Understanding Adversary Culture” (n.d.), http://www.e-mapsys.com/Cultural_Matters.pdf, quoted from: Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner, Baltimore: Penguin Books, 81.

keep a dog in the house.”²⁵ This view differs greatly from many Westerners who treat their dogs as part of the family, sharing living space without thinking twice about it. This cultural misunderstanding came to a head in 2008 when four surviving Taliban members were captured after a raid that ended in a gun battle. The four were taken to a forward operating base (FOB) and held overnight in dog pens before they could be securely transferred to an established detention facility at Tarin Kowt. The Afghan National Army soldiers who worked at the FOB were angered by how the infidels were handling the Muslim captives by placing them in a holding pen that had previously been used to house dogs.²⁶ The incident created cultural friction between Coalition soldiers and their Afghan counterparts.

Cultural friction within warfare is inevitable, but it can be minimized with education and training. Two types of cultural friction, natural and operational, are found in any operating environment. *Natural friction* occurs when cultural norms fail to transfer from one’s own culture to the culture in which that individual is operating. The natural friction points are those usually briefed as dos and don’ts during a cultural awareness briefing.²⁷ In Afghanistan, there may be actions considered culturally taboo in America, like the way Afghans look upon male-male public displays of affection (PDA), for example. “It is normal for male Afghans to hold hands while they walk together; it is normal for Afghans of the same sex to kiss each other on the cheeks when greeting; these gestures signal friendship, not physical attraction.”²⁸ The Air Force’s Afghanistan Field Guide goes on to say, “Never back away from such PDA if an Afghan graciously extends it to you – you’ll cause offense.”²⁹ Without study, these types of cultural norms fail to transfer to Western observers, and the overt interpretation of this type of PDA would be misunderstood causing friction or apprehension.

²⁵ Palash Ghosh, “Taliban Captures NATO Military Dog: Why Are Canines So Hated In Islamic World And South Asia?,” *International Business Times*, February 12, 2014, <http://www.ibtimes.com/taliban-captures-nato-military-dog-why-are-canines-so-hated-islamic-world-south-asia-1554741>.

²⁶ “Cultural Misunderstanding in a War Zone,” *The Age: Federal Politics*, September 3, 2008, <http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/editorial/cultural-misunderstandings-in-a-war-zone-20080902-47yz.html>.

²⁷ Alejandro Briceno, “The Use of Cultural Studies in Military Operations” (United States Marine Corps Command and Staff College, Marine Corps University, 2008), 13.

²⁸ Air Force Culture & Language Center, “Expeditionary Culture Field Guide: Afghanistan,” 36.

²⁹ Air Force Culture & Language Center, “Expeditionary Culture Field Guide: Afghanistan,” 36.

Operational friction can be known or unknown, and is the result of military activity.³⁰ A proper understanding of the cultural context in which one is operating enables the reduction of operational friction. In Afghanistan knowing the culture and establishing relationships within the region provides operational flexibility. In this culture, it is proper to await an invitation to enter a mosque and to remove one's shoes before entering.³¹ However, if the time arises that a unit must chase an "enemy sniper into a mosque, they would enter without hesitation and without removing their footwear."³² Understanding the unit has just made a cultural mistake—even though done out of necessity—it would behoove the unit leader to apologize for the intrusion to show respect for the Afghan's religious beliefs and cultural traditions. Doing so would help to maintain credibility and minimize operational friction.

Strategic Employment

We have learned many lessons over the last 10 years, but one of the most compelling is that—whether you are working among the citizens of a country, or working with their government or Armed Forces—nothing is as important to your long term success as understanding the prevailing culture and value.

~ General Ray Odierno

The DoD's vision for LREC is that the department will have the required combination of language skills, regional expertise, and cultural capabilities to meet current and projected needs. The DoD's vision is supported by its goal to strengthen language skills, regional expertise, and cultural capabilities to increase interoperability and to build partner capacity.³³ In January 2014, the DoD published its LREC Implementation Plan. This strategic document articulated the plan to meet the Department's vision of language and cultural expertise. More specifically, it aimed to strengthen partnerships through greater cultural understanding, which will increase international interoperability and partner-building capacity. The "Total Force of today and tomorrow, together with our partners and allies, requires globally competent

³⁰ Briceno, "The Use of Cultural Studies in Military Operations," 13.

³¹ Air Force Culture & Language Center, "Expeditionary Culture Field Guide: Afghanistan," 42.

³² Briceno, "The Use of Cultural Studies in Military Operations," 13.

³³ Department of Defense (DoD), "Strategic Plan for Language Skills, Regional Expertise, and Cultural Capabilities 2011-2016" (Department of Defense (DoD), February 15, 2011).

personnel who are equipped with mission-critical language skills, regional expertise, and cultural capabilities.”³⁴ Additionally, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs reinforced the importance of LREC by characterizing them as “enduring warfighter competencies critical to global mission readiness and integral to joint operations.... The continued threat to American and Allied interests at home and abroad reinforces the need to maintain and improve the LREC capabilities of the DoD.”³⁵

The protracted war in Afghanistan highlighted the crucial need for LREC. Resounding themes of cultural understanding are found throughout any of the national strategic documents that posture our nation for success. They emphasize the imperative of leveraging culture expertise and foreign language skills to not only build partnerships, but also to sustain strong alliances to preserve peace and stability in various regions across the world.

Strategic Guidance

Today’s military establishment—its active duty, reserve, and civilian personnel—must be trained and ready to engage the world with an appreciation of diverse cultures and to communicate directly with local populations. These skills save lives.

~ U.S. House Armed Services Committee

The DoD envisions its force to have the required combination of LREC capabilities to meet current and projected needs. This vision will be “supported by three goals that will systematically identify, build, and strengthen language skills, regional expertise, and cultural capabilities.”³⁶ The first is to identify, validate, and prioritize requirements to support DoD missions; second, to build, enhance, and sustain a force ready to meet existing and emerging national security needs; last, increase interoperability and build partner capacity. “Achieving these goals will enable military and civilian personnel to successfully overcome language and culture barriers inherent to

³⁴ Department of Defense (DoD), *Implementation Plan for Language Skills, Regional Expertise, and Cultural Capabilities (LREC)*, Government (Department of Defense, January 2014), 3.

³⁵ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction (CJCSI) 3126.01A, “Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture (LREC) Capability Identification, Planning, and Sourcing” (Joint Chiefs of Staff, January 31, 2013).

³⁶ Department of Defense (DoD), “Strategic Plan for Language Skills, Regional Expertise, and Cultural Capabilities 2011-2016,” 8.

global missions.”³⁷ It is imperative that we, as military operators representing our nation overseas, understand the culture in which we are operating to avoid strategic missteps and enhance our nation’s image across the globe. We must be aware of natural friction points and use that knowledge to our advantage during times of operational friction. Clifford Stanley, the Under Secretary of Defense stated, “It is imperative that our men and women...are prepared for the linguistic, geographical, and cultural complexities of international environments to successfully meet the operational demands of our global commitments.”³⁸ This focused approach to LREC is reiterated through our nation’s strategic guidance and will play a key role as the U.S. strategic focus shifts to the Asia-Pacific region.

Strategically, the U.S. seeks to strengthen international and regional security in Asia and the Pacific. To accomplish this, the National Military Strategy states that a U.S. presence combined with alliance commitments remain essential to preserving stability and investing renewed attention and resources in the region. China is a focal point within the Asia-Pacific, and the U.S. seeks to improve its relationship with the Chinese by expanding mutual interests and improving mutual understanding to reduce misperceptions and prevent strategic miscalculations.³⁹ In 2012 President Obama and Defense Secretary Panetta published, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership – Priorities for 21st Century Defense*, which signaled a strategic rebalance in regional focus towards the Asia-Pacific, where many economic and diplomatic opportunities have become increasingly vital to U.S. core national interests. Reinforced in the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review, it stated, “the U.S. [will] rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region, seeking to preserve peace and stability in a region that is increasingly central to U.S. political, economic, and security interests.”⁴⁰ This shift into Phase Zero shaping operations will bring with it an increased emphasis on LREC capabilities to ensure the U.S. is prepared to operate in the extremely diverse Asia-Pacific region.

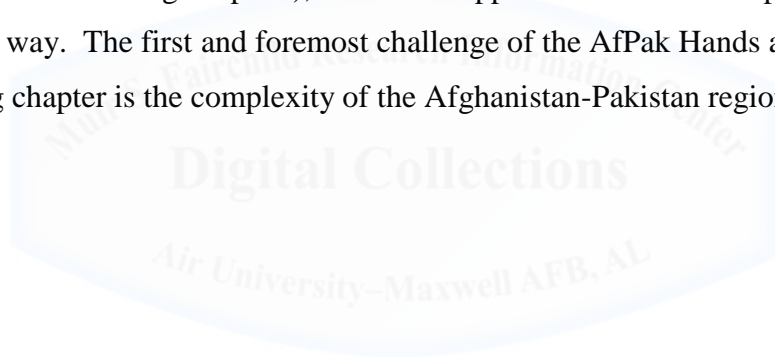
³⁷ Department of Defense (DoD), “Strategic Plan for Language Skills, Regional Expertise, and Cultural Capabilities 2011-2016,” 8.

³⁸ Department of Defense (DoD), “Strategic Plan for Language Skills, Regional Expertise, and Cultural Capabilities 2011-2016,” 4.

³⁹ Department of Defense (DoD), “The National Military Strategy (NMS) of the United States of America, 2011” (Department of Defense (DoD), 2011), 13.

⁴⁰ Department of Defense (DoD), “Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) 2014” (Department of Defense (DoD), 2014), http://www.defense.gov/pubs/2014_Quadrennial_Defense_Review.pdf, VIII.

It is hard to comprehend the enormity of the Asia-Pacific, the most culturally and geographically diverse region in the world, much less conceptualize how the U.S. would attempt to fully embrace the four billion people that make up its 36 nations. However, there is an LREC program of the past that has been revised for the present and will be used as the foundation for future cultural operations within a strategic plan—The Hands’ program. Having its origin in the Far-East during the interwar years, the program was disbanded shortly after the Second World War but was resurrected in 2009 to assist in reforming a struggling strategy that lacked cultural awareness within Afghanistan. The Hands program infused culturally trained service members, who could also speak the local language, to act as intermediaries between Coalition leaders and their Afghan counterparts. Although this contemporary program, known as AfPak Hands, has successfully integrated the cultural context of an extremely diverse region into strategy (discussed in following chapters), it has not happened without missteps and challenges along the way. The first and foremost challenge of the AfPak Hands and subject of the following chapter is the complexity of the Afghanistan-Pakistan region.



Chapter 3

The Afghanistan-Pakistan (AfPak) Region

To carry out a war effectively, to win it, it is indispensable to identify the adversary exactly.

~ Roger Trinquier

This chapter is not a comprehensive explanation of the cultural codes of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Its purpose is to provide an introductory overview of the LREC complexities of the region and a snapshot that will later be used as a tool to compare the cultural codes of this region with that of the Asia-Pacific region. What follows is a succinct breakdown of the geography, people, society, and cultural nuances of both Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Decoding Afghanistan

Afghanistan is a landlocked country and contains a wide range of geographic features to include mountainous terrain, desert, and plains. It is approximately 250,000 square miles, which is roughly the size of America's Pacific Northwest states of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho combined.¹ The mountains are its most striking and challenging feature. They include the 600 mile long Hindu Kush range which contains a peak of over 24,000 feet and connects, in the most northeastern part of the country, to the highest mountain system in the world, commonly known as the "roof of the world."² Four major river systems provide life-sustaining water for use by the people throughout the country.³

The Afghan people—approximately 32 million strong and 75 percent rural—are situated at the crossroads of Asia. The area is valued historically as a popular, profitable, and strategic trade route connecting China and Europe, forcing the people of the region to endure instability and strife for much of their nation's existence.⁴ The struggle of the

¹ "South Asia: Afghanistan" (Central Intelligence Agency: The World Factbook, 2014 2013), <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>, 1.

² "Islamic Republic of Afghanistan" (CultureGrams World Edition, 2014), www.culturegrams.com, 1.

³ "Islamic Republic of Afghanistan," 1.

⁴ "Islamic Republic of Afghanistan," 1.

Afghans continues today primarily between the Taliban—who took control of the country in 2000—and the International Coalition-backed Afghan government.⁵ The population consists primarily of four ethnic groups: Pashtuns (42 percent), Tajiks (27 percent), Uzbeks (9 percent), and Hazara (9 percent). The remaining 13 percent of the population include small numbers of ethnicities from neighboring countries.⁶ Within the diversity of the Afghan people, there are over 30 different languages and dialects spoken, but the official languages are Dari and Pashto.⁷ While “most people speak both...Dari is more common, but Pashto is the language of the national anthem.”⁸ Islam is the predominant religion of the majority of Afghans, of which 80 percent are Sunni, and 19 percent are Shi’a Muslims.⁹

The national identity of the Afghan society and its people is weak, primarily because loyalty resides with their kinship, family, or tribe. Life centers on the extended family, and children are a parent’s source of pride.¹⁰ Personal honor and face are extremely important—especially regarding family—which can lead to deep conflict and difficult dispute resolution between factions. Men hold the dominant role in the household and the community; they handle most of the contacts with the outside world and are involved in the village council and other politics. The senior male is the leader of the family.¹¹ The perception of wealth is dependent upon where the Afghan resides. Urban Afghans value money and possessions, rural Afghans value land and family, and nomadic Afghans value the size of their herd of goats.¹² Although cell phone usage has risen dramatically in recent years, with the literacy rate only at 28 percent, the primary means of contact with the outside world is through radio.¹³ In fact, the British Broadcasting Corporation offers broadcasts in Dari and Pashto.¹⁴ Agriculture and mining make up the bulk of the economy’s labor force (7.5 million people). Afghanistan offers very little in exported goods, however, and most agriculture is for internal consumption.¹⁵

⁵ “Islamic Republic of Afghanistan,” 2.

⁶ “South Asia: Afghanistan,” 2.

⁷ Denise Coleman, ed., “Afghanistan: 2014 Country Review” (CountryWatch, Inc., 2014), www.countrywatch.com, 279.

⁸ “Islamic Republic of Afghanistan,” 3.

⁹ “South Asia: Afghanistan,” 2.

¹⁰ “Islamic Republic of Afghanistan,” 3-4.

¹¹ “Islamic Republic of Afghanistan,” 5.

¹² “Islamic Republic of Afghanistan,” 3.

¹³ Coleman, “Afghanistan: 2014 Country Review,” 280.

¹⁴ “Pashto,” News Media, *British Broadcasting Company (BBC)*, accessed January 15, 2015, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/pashto>.

¹⁵ “South Asia: Afghanistan,” 8.

The production of poppies, the essential ingredient when processing opium and heroin, is a highly lucrative business and contributes to one-third of the country's 45 billion dollar Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Moving around the country is difficult and dangerous; only 29 percent of the roads are paved and traversing off-road is dangerous due to land mines that were placed and armed during their years of conflict with the Soviet Union. Most Afghans do not own a vehicle; they travel by foot, or, if fortunate enough, by horse-drawn carts, donkey, or horseback.¹⁶ With the backdrop of ongoing violence, the general health of the Afghan people is poor. The rural areas lack medical facilities, and international aid provides a large portion of Afghanistan's daily food supplies, but even so, many of the country's youth are undernourished. While sanitation and potable water are adequate in urban areas, the same is not true for rural areas of the country.¹⁷

Less apparent than the aforementioned attributes of the country yet deeply tied to cultural identity are the cultural nuances found within Afghanistan. They are often overlooked thus leading to the majority of cultural missteps, but an outsider with proper cultural study and understanding can avoid those mistakes. Foundational to cultural understanding within Afghanistan is Islam, as it plays a significant role and guides most Afghans' lives, but it is not quite that simple. Local behavioral norms govern the daily activities and interactions of the people. For example, *Pashtunwali* is essentially a code of conduct that entails "elements such as bravery, loyalty, hospitality, and dignity as an unwritten code of life among the Pashtuns."¹⁸ These traits, displayed by a Pashtun tribe on the foothills of the Hindu Kush Mountains, were exactly what saved a Navy SEAL's life. The infamous Operation Redwing has now become highly publicized in the book and feature film, *The Lone Survivor*. The story highlights the compassion and loyalty shown by the tribe to protect the SEAL from the clutches of the Taliban, even at the expense of their own lives. Some other prominent cultural norms include social behaviors such as handshakes, common among men, but highly inappropriate between men and women in public; for a man to even touch a woman in public violates socio-cultural norms.¹⁹ Men tend to link arms or hold hands while walking.²⁰ They do not use

¹⁶ "Islamic Republic of Afghanistan," 8.

¹⁷ Coleman, "Afghanistan: 2014 Country Review," 280.

¹⁸ "Islamic Republic of Afghanistan," 3.

¹⁹ Coleman, "Afghanistan: 2014 Country Review," 315.

hands or gestures when speaking, but during a conversation, Afghan men tend to finger beads to bring strength from Allah.²¹ When in groups, Afghans sit with their legs crossed without pointing the soles of the feet towards anyone. Additionally, they will not use their left hand—reserved for personal hygiene—to pass, serve, or eat.²² When dining, it is polite to drink more than one cup of tea, and a belch, when finished eating, is customary to show satisfaction with the meal.²³

Decoding Pakistan

Pakistan is Afghanistan's southern neighbor; it is just over 300,000 square miles, which is slightly bigger than the state of Texas.²⁴ Like Afghanistan, the mountains of Pakistan are some of the highest in the world; they include K2, the world's second highest mountain peak (28,000 feet) behind Mt. Everest (29,000 feet).²⁵ In addition to the mountainous terrain, the features are very similar to the desert and plains of its Afghan neighbor; the distinguishing difference between them is Pakistan's 650 miles of Arabian Sea coastline.²⁶

At just over 196 million people, Pakistan is a primarily rural country with 65 percent of its population living in rural areas. The two largest urban centers are Karachi (14 million) and Lahore (5 million).²⁷ The people of Pakistan belong primarily to one of six major ethnic groups: Punjabi (45 percent), Pashtuns (15 percent), Sindhi (14 percent), Sariaqi (8 percent), Muhajirs (7 percent), and Baluchi (4 percent).²⁸ Pakistan's border population has grown significantly with Afghan refugees trying to escape the war and violence in their country. English is one of the official languages taught in school and used in government; the other is Urdu, which is Pakistan's national unifying language.²⁹ In addition to the official languages, there are more than ten different regional languages

²⁰ Air Force Culture & Language Center, "Expeditionary Culture Field Guide: Afghanistan," 36.

²¹ "Islamic Republic of Afghanistan," 4.

²² Coleman, "Afghanistan: 2014 Country Review," 315.

²³ "Islamic Republic of Afghanistan," 4.

²⁴ "Islamic Republic of Pakistan" (CultureGrams World Edition, 2015), www.culturegrams.com, 1.

²⁵ "K2," Information, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, (September 3, 2013), <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/309107/K2>.

²⁶ "South Asia: Pakistan" (Central Intelligence Agency: The World Factbook, 2014 2013), 1/7/2015, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>, 2.

²⁷ "Islamic Republic of Pakistan," 3.

²⁸ "South Asia: Pakistan," 2.

²⁹ "Islamic Republic of Pakistan," 3.

and many different dialects within Pakistan.³⁰ However, the majority of the population speaks Urdu—the national language—in addition to their own regional or provincial language.³¹ Also much like Afghanistan, the unifying force of Pakistan is Islam; the country is 95 percent Muslim of which 75 percent are Sunni and 20 percent Shi'a.³² The remaining five percent are predominantly Hindu, Christian, and Parsi.³³ The Pakistani government enforces freedom of worship, although it does segregate voting rights of non-Muslim groups.³⁴

Pakistani nationalism is low, as most people identify primarily with and support their regional or tribal groups. The nation is pressed between the ongoing turbulence in Afghanistan to the north and its conflict with India to the south. Since both Pakistan and India possess nuclear weapons, the tension between them revolving around the disputed ownership of Kashmir runs high on the national and international stage.³⁵ Three wars and multiple cross-border conflicts have occurred over Kashmir, all of which ended—through international pressure—in cease-fire without an enduring resolution. Despite the tension with India, the Pakistani's national identity remains low. The “family is the center of social life and support.”³⁶ The parents raise their children to assume the role of caretaker for their parents as they age. There are several newspapers, radio and television stations, but access to them is limited in rural areas and the literacy rate is nearly double that of Afghanistan at 55 percent.³⁷ Moreover, the literacy for women is among the lowest in the world, and the children rarely finish school, leaving early to help work with the family. The use of cell phones has steadily risen in recent years to 70 percent of the population. Agriculture dominates Pakistan's labor force (60 million people) and employs nearly half. The other half is employed in the industry and services sectors; of the active labor force, only about seven percent remains unemployed.³⁸ Agriculture also accounts for half of all exports and is primarily made up of rice, cotton, wheat, sugarcane,

³⁰ Denise Coleman, ed., “Pakistan: 2014 Country Review” (CountryWatch, Inc., 2014), www.countrywatch.com, 2.

³¹ “Islamic Republic of Pakistan,” 3.

³² “Islamic Republic of Pakistan,” 3.

³³ Coleman, “Pakistan: 2014 Country Review,” 275.

³⁴ “Islamic Republic of Pakistan,” 3.

³⁵ Coleman, “Pakistan: 2014 Country Review,” 1.

³⁶ “Islamic Republic of Pakistan,” 4.

³⁷ “South Asia: Pakistan,” 5.

³⁸ “South Asia: Pakistan,” 9.

fruits, and vegetables, all of which contribute to the country's \$574 billion GDP.³⁹ Getting those grains out of the rural areas to prepare for export is not an easy task as only 72 percent of all roads are paved, and those that are paved are in poor condition. In rural areas the primary means of transportation are donkeys and horse-drawn carts, while urban areas have public transportation such as buses, taxis, and motorized rickshaws.⁴⁰ Overall health is poor, largely caused by the lack of safe drinking water, contributing to widespread malaria. Medical services are limited in urban society and virtually non-existent in rural communities.⁴¹

As with Afghanistan—or any other unfamiliar culture—the cultural nuances are what separate the culturally competent from the incompetent and can likewise separate a mission accomplished from a mission failed. In Pakistan, a handshake among men is a common form of greeting, while close friends may embrace. Women will frequently hug or kiss while greeting other women. However, it is inappropriate for a man to shake hands with or even touch a woman in public; they may exchange a verbal greeting.⁴² Much like the Afghans, the bottom of the foot or shoe should not point at another person. To avoid doing so, most Pakistani people, when sitting, squat or sit with both feet on the ground, and, when removing their shoes, they place the soles together.⁴³ In addition, when passing items, the right hand is used or, if needed, both hands may be used, while most people eat with the right hand because of the uncleanness of the left. If invited to visit, unlike the Afghans, guests often bring gifts if well acquainted with the host.⁴⁴ In Pakistan it is “customary to socialize before a meal and then to leave soon after the meal is finished.”⁴⁵ Men do not socialize with women who are not their relatives, and the men will usually take the visiting male to a special room for conversation. Finally, during Ramadan it is polite for non-Muslims to avoid eating or drinking in front of fasting Muslims.

³⁹ “Islamic Republic of Pakistan,” 8.

⁴⁰ “Islamic Republic of Pakistan,” 8.

⁴¹ “Islamic Republic of Pakistan,” 9.

⁴² Coleman, “Pakistan: 2014 Country Review,” 309.

⁴³ Coleman, “Pakistan: 2014 Country Review,” 309.

⁴⁴ Coleman, “Pakistan: 2014 Country Review,” 310.

⁴⁵ “Islamic Republic of Pakistan,” 4.

Through a cursory study of cultural influences in Afghanistan and Pakistan, one starts to see their complexity particularly when seen through the lens of an international or cross-border setting. Both Afghanistan and Pakistan are predominantly Muslim countries that share very similar geographical features. Both countries have very limited national identity with the people and are dominated by the role of family and tribes. Similarly, the majority of each population lives in a rural environment, but the role of government—although turbulent—is much more prominent in Pakistan than Afghanistan. The literacy rate and access to media (television, radio, and newspaper) are much higher in Pakistan, but both countries are experiencing greater connectivity using cellular phones. Unemployment is high, and overall health is poor with a lack of medical facilities in both countries. Moreover, agriculture dominates each country's industry although Pakistan—with a much higher GDP—offers a more legitimate export in the form of high-yield grains versus the illegitimate poppy production found in Afghanistan. Overall, the two countries offer more overt similarities than not; combined they have more than 40 languages, but that number can be truncated to four primary languages (Dari, Pashtu, Urdu, and English) used to communicate with the majority of their collective population of nearly 230 million. Lastly, the two countries together cover over 550,000 square miles, with most of the population spread across the rural countryside. The overt details are important for planning, but learning the cultural nuances is where a strategist or operator can be most effective. Understanding the subtle differences between cultures is essential when interacting with the local populous, like how to greet, dine, and interact.

To interact effectively and prevent alienating potential partners, one must research and decode the country in which operations occur. The decoding process should seek to understand the basics of the country and the culture. Let us revisit our definition of culture from the last chapter: Culture is “fundamental to all aspects of human existence, culture shapes the way humans view life and functions as a tool we use to adapt to our social and physical environments. A culture is the sum of all the beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning for a society.”⁴⁶ The road to cultural

⁴⁶ Air Force Culture & Language Center, “Expeditionary Culture Field Guide: Afghanistan.”

competence is not easy, but it pays dividends when building partnerships abroad. The next chapter will examine the Afghanistan-Pakistan (AfPak) Hands program that the U.S. instituted in the midst of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM to solve its cultural incompetence dilemma. We can then evaluate the extent to which the culturally competent Hand acts as a proxy for the host nation populace and Coalition forces to boost cross-cultural understanding, communication, and operational effectiveness within Afghanistan and Pakistan.



Chapter 4

Leveraging Cultural Understanding Is A Hand's Duty

I am here to make the case for strengthening our capacity to use 'soft' power.... One of the most important lessons of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is that military success is not sufficient to win.

~ Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates

Culture in Action ... the Hands' Origin

The title of Hand, when used to describe a Foreign Service worker or diplomat, did not arise until early in the twentieth century in the form of the China Hands. After the First World War, the Rogers Act of 1924 sought to reform “the foreign services by establishing a career organization based on competitive examination and merit promotion.” The program was “open to any American citizen who has the necessary qualifications;” it sought to recruit the best and brightest candidates to act as career diplomats.¹ The product of the Rogers Act was a group of American Foreign Service officers who represented the U.S. in China before, during and after World War II.² Commonly referred to as the Old China Hands, it was a program developed to familiarize the U.S. with Chinese culture and build strategic relationships in the Far East.³ The primary responsibility of the China Hands and the Hands program in general was to understand the intricacies of the culture; “they not only encouraged the Chinese they met to appreciate certain American values, but also tried to interpret Chinese perspectives to Americans.”⁴ While interacting and building relationships, the Hands reported freely to the U.S. what they saw, heard, and thought.⁵ One can start to imagine the Hands’ strategic importance during the Second World War as the U.S. sought to keep China as an active participant; their job became “to help persuade all Chinese forces—Nationalists and Communists alike—to vigorously prosecute the war.”⁶ The key to the Hands’ ability

¹ “A Short History of the Department of State: The Rogers Act,” *U.S. Department of State: Office of the Historian*, accessed January 15, 2015, <https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/short-history/rogers>.

² Paul Gordon Lauren, ed., *The China Hands' Legacy: Ethics and Diplomacy* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), 10.

³ Everett Drumright, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project: Ambassador Everett Drumright, interview by Hank Zivetz, Oral, July 27, 1989, 6.

⁴ Lauren, *The China Hands' Legacy*, 94.

⁵ E. J. Kahn, *The China Hands: America's Foreign Service Officers and What Befell Them* (New York: Viking, 1975), 69.

⁶ Lauren, *The China Hands' Legacy*, 16.

to work with both the Nationalists and the Communists during World War II was the cultivation of relationships and credibility well before the onset of war—a proactive approach.

The Contemporary Program: Afghanistan-Pakistan Hands

For the first time, we will treat Afghanistan and Pakistan as two countries, but as with one challenge in one region. Our strategy focuses more intensively on Pakistan than in the past, and this is normal, because it's a newer problem.

~ National Security Advisor GEN James Jones

Over the last fourteen years of conflict, Operation ENDURING FREEDOM has forced the U.S. to operate in a culturally diverse and challenging environment where the use and integration of soft power into the overall strategy has become critical. Unfortunately, those experiences have demonstrated that our operators and strategic decision makers were poorly equipped to understand and operate effectively within foreign cultures and societies. In turn, their struggles solidified the importance of soft power—more specifically, cross-cultural and regional competence within the profession of arms. Now, Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture (LREC) have become a top priority for our military.⁷ The first product of this realization was the Afghanistan-Pakistan (AfPak) Hands program established in 2009. Announced as a high-priority program that would “change the paradigm” of employment within a culturally diverse arena, it called for the development of “a cohort of experts who speak the local language, are culturally attuned, and are focused on the problem for an extended period of time.”⁸ This section will first look at the mission, vision and training program of the AfPak Hands. Then I will outline the knowledge and proficiency requirements of a Hand. Finally, I will lay out the operational phases best suited for a Hands-like program.

⁷ Wunderle and Combat Studies Institute (U.S.), *Through the Lens of Cultural Awareness*.

⁸ Cohee and Wilkinson, *Research and Analysis Project for Afghanistan-Pakistan Hands - Cohort 1*, 9.

Environment, Mission, and Vision

Through its unique training and deployment format, the AfPak Program has improved the quality, continuity and engagement in key positions in and out of theater.

~ General Martin Dempsey, CJCS

Slightly different from the China Hands of the twentieth century, which was a predominantly civilian organization built by the U.S. State Department prior to the outbreak of war, its contemporary rendition—AfPak Hands—was implemented in the midst of conflict by the DoD. Its purpose was to understand the cultural complexity of the region and its associated friction that plagued Coalition forces when operating in a culturally diverse environment. The “program was established to create greater continuity, focus, and persistent engagement in Afghanistan and Pakistan.” The mission of the AfPak Hands program is to support key campaign objectives by involving the Hands across all the lines of operation to leverage their expertise in connecting with the people, the government, and the national security leadership.⁹ The program developed a cadre of military and civilian experts who speak the local language, are culturally attuned and focused on regional issues for an extended duration. Managed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, AfPak personnel rotate through positions in and out of the theater at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels, directly influencing coalition objectives in the region. The program seeks to infuse culturally attuned officers into already existing Coalition staff billets and key “chains of command [to] facilitate...unity of effort” throughout the region.¹⁰ Both Hands programs—new and old—sought and continue to seek a strategic effect through cultural understanding and relationship building. The difference between the two programs is that the State Department took a proactive approach when establishing a cohort of China Hands while the DoD took a reactive approach when attempting to change the paradigm of the U.S. employment of counterinsurgency with the AfPak Hands. Both of these programs, as with future Hands-like programs, represent a time-honored humanist tradition “that one could promote mutual understanding through

⁹ James Muir, “AFPAK Hands (APH) Program Overview,” (UNCLAS PowerPoint, June 11, 2012), http://www.public.navy.mil/BUPERS-NPC/CAREER/LANGUAGE_CULTURE/Pages/AFPAKHands.aspx.

¹⁰ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction (CJCSI) 1630.01, “Afghanistan/Pakistan Hands (APH) Program” (US Joint Staff, April 30, 2014), 1.

personal contact.”¹¹ For them to achieve this vision, the Hands need in-depth LREC training to operate effectively within the culture as they seek to build relationships.

Hands Training Program

They will have various levels of experience, but the bottom line is they have a greater understanding of how these countries work. ... These folks will study as much as they can and learn as much as they can. ... Then they will go back into Afghanistan or Pakistan into key billets where they need someone who thinks at that strategic level and has a deeper understanding of the regional issues and dynamics.

~ AfPak Hands Division Chief

Hands need in-depth training in LREC to empower them with the tools to build relationships across cultural boundaries. The twentieth century China Hands were high aptitude individuals who in many cases had a background in Chinese. Some were born into missionary families and raised in the Far East while many took an early liking to the country and studied the language and culture on their own. In some cases, college graduates, many of whom were young and single, were lured into the Foreign Service and the Far East by the “prospect of adventure in an exotic land.”¹² Once selected, the China Hands were engrossed with the language and culture of the Chinese; “they normally underwent two years of initiation in Chinese language, history, and economics at our embassy in Peking,” but most “generally conceded that it took a minimum of about ten years in China” to form the expertise needed to earn the title of Hand.¹³ Opposed to the China Hands, the contemporary AfPak Hands did not have the luxury of ten years of on-the-job training—or even two for that matter—to build the expertise deemed necessary by its predecessor.

Building a Hands program in the midst of conflict has its challenges, most notably the expedient recruitment of the most capable individuals for the job. One of the most deadly years of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM—2008—prompted President Obama to announce, in March 2009, “a comprehensive, new strategy for Afghanistan and

¹¹ Lauren, *The China Hands' Legacy*, 94.

¹² Kahn, *The China Hands*, 37.

¹³ Lauren, *The China Hands' Legacy*; Kahn, *The China Hands*, 35.

Pakistan.”¹⁴ This new strategy increased the resources directed towards those two countries, and the following August the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs announced the establishment of the AfPak Hands program. The program, a product of the minds of two of the United States’ most senior military officers (Admiral Michael Mullen and General Stanley McChrystal), sought to resurrect, reinvent, and rebrand the Old China Hands program into its contemporary form—AfPak Hands.¹⁵ In October, “less than two months after the program was announced, [and seven months from the President’s new strategy announcement] the first group of AfPak Hands began their language training.”¹⁶ The urgency to shift the strategy and make changes in theater created a program that initially overlooked qualifications in exchange for expediency.

The selection process did not require existing LREC capability or aptitude, but emphasized grade, professional expertise (AFSC/MOS), master’s degree, and a secret security clearance.¹⁷ There was very little guidance on the program and even less Service component buy-in; “it was a top-down-driven vision that not many people understood—including the Services”¹⁸ It was left to the individual Service components to identify, select, and provide members for the program. The hasty program implementation forced “each Service to rapidly provide a specified number of people to fill key AfPak billets” which led to a reluctance of the Services to provide their best and brightest due to fear of career implications.¹⁹ Approximately 80 percent of those selected were considered non-volunteers.²⁰ The less-than-optimal aptitude of those selected for the program prompted the Chairman to readdress the Services in December 2009; Admiral Mullen stated, “in many cases, the volunteers have been the right people...this is not the case across the board.” He continued, “This program demands the best and brightest.... My intent is that this program be an accelerator rather than an inhibitor to career progression within

¹⁴ “Remarks by the President on a New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan,” *The White House: Office of the Press Secretary*, March 27, 2009, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-a-new-strategy-afghanistan-and-pakistan>.

¹⁵ CAPT Russell McLachlan, USN (Former AfPak Hands Program Manager, U.S. Forces Afghanistan), interviewed by the author, 4 Feb 15.

¹⁶ Cohee and Wilkinson, *Research and Analysis Project for Afghanistan-Pakistan Hands - Cohort 1*, 15.

¹⁷ Cohee and Wilkinson, *Research and Analysis Project for Afghanistan-Pakistan Hands - Cohort 1*, 25.

¹⁸ Russell McLachlan, DoD Bloggers Roundtable with CAPT Russell McLachlan (USN), Program Manager, U.S. Forces Afghanistan: Afghan Hands Program, September 28, 2010, <http://www.dodlive.mil.edgekey.net/index.php/2010/09/dodlive-bloggers-roundtable-afghan-hands-program/>.

¹⁹ Cohee and Wilkinson, *Research and Analysis Project for Afghanistan-Pakistan Hands - Cohort 1*, 25.

²⁰ CAPT Russell McLachlan, USN (Former AfPak Hands Program Manager, U.S. Forces Afghanistan), interviewed by the author, 4 Feb 15.

each of the Services...AfPak Hands is the military's number one manpower priority."²¹ The two to ten years of dedicated culture and language training identified nearly a century before would not be an option for the most recent version of Hands. However, the AfPak Hands would enter into a short and intense training program focused on preparing them for the upcoming deployment. The program started with Combat Skills Training (CST) followed by a five-phase training plan that would send them in and out of Afghanistan or Pakistan for the next three years.

The dangerous environment in which the Hands would operate necessitated the inclusion of CST prior to the five-phase LREC training program. The CST included familiarization training on weapons, vehicle defensive driving, improvised explosive device (IED) awareness, convoy operations, ground navigation, and first aid.²² Following CST, Phase One lasted approximately six months. The goal of the first phase is to build a strong foundation through "an intense and comprehensive overview of various fundamentals of the AfPak region...so they can build upon this knowledge."²³ The first two months of training are focused on the culture of these two countries, "dedicated to creating culturally astute leaders, capable of understanding and operating in varied socio-political environments."²⁴ In addition to developing a solid understanding of U.S. interests and strategy in the region, the Hands also focus on geography, people, society, and cultural nuances of Afghanistan and Pakistan. They seek to attain a basic understanding of the fundamentals of Islam in addition to the political and economic dynamics of the region. Prior to diving into language training, the Hands receive advanced counterinsurgency training to increase their knowledge of the insurgency, population behavior, rule of law, ethics, and how to engage the local populace.²⁵ Language training is the capstone and the majority of Phase One. It lasts approximately four months at the Defense Language Institute (DLI) where the Hands learn either Dari, Pashto (Afghanistan Hand) or Urdu (Pakistan Hand).²⁶ Approximately 70 percent of the Hands learn Dari, 20 percent learn Pashto, and the remaining 10 percent are Pakistan

²¹ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) CM-0948-09, "Career Management of Afghanistan Pakistan (AFPAK) Hands Program" (Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, December 14, 2009).

²² Cohee and Wilkinson, *Research and Analysis Project for Afghanistan-Pakistan Hands - Cohort 1*, 25.

²³ Cohee and Wilkinson, *Research and Analysis Project for Afghanistan-Pakistan Hands - Cohort 1*, 26.

²⁴ Cohee and Wilkinson, *Research and Analysis Project for Afghanistan-Pakistan Hands - Cohort 1*, 26.

²⁵ Cohee and Wilkinson, *Research and Analysis Project for Afghanistan-Pakistan Hands - Cohort 1*, 26.

²⁶ Cohee and Wilkinson, *Research and Analysis Project for Afghanistan-Pakistan Hands - Cohort 1*, 27.

Hands who learn Urdu.²⁷ The purpose of the four months of language training is not to attain functional proficiency; rather, like their cultural training, the goal is to build an elementary level foundation to expand upon through their upcoming deployment and future training.

The second phase is the first of two 9-to-12 month-long deployments to their respective country, either Afghanistan or Pakistan. This phase begins with a ten-day in-country culture and language immersion to solidify the LREC skills learned over the previous six months. The immersion is followed by the Hand's placement to an in-theater position as a mentor or advisor to host-nation officials. The positions are meant to have strategic impact by allowing "the Hands to use their culture and language training to build trust and long-lasting positive relationships more quickly and effectively" than those who have not received specialized LREC training.²⁸ Security dictates how much the Hand can interact with locals. Ideally, the interaction would happen frequently to build upon and enhance the Hand's cultural understanding. In addition to maintaining Hands' LREC proficiency, the exposure would increase their opportunity to build relationships while interacting with the population.

The remainder of the program, Phases Three through Five, continues to build upon the foundation of Phase One. The Hands' training consists of an educate-deploy-educate-deploy construct. Phase Three continues the language training and strategically places the Hands in staff assignments that are deeply involved in the AfPak regional issues or grade-appropriate developmental education such as National Defense University and National Defense Intelligence University.²⁹ In addition to their staff or school assignment, the Hands continuously "engage in a language maintenance curriculum... [consisting of] five hours of weekly web-based instruction...supplemented by direct interaction" with language instructors.³⁰ Language maintenance training is critical to the preparation of each Hand for the next phase of the program.

²⁷ Cohee and Wilkinson, *Research and Analysis Project for Afghanistan-Pakistan Hands - Cohort 1*, 28.

²⁸ Cohee and Wilkinson, *Research and Analysis Project for Afghanistan-Pakistan Hands - Cohort 1*, 29.

²⁹ Cohee and Wilkinson, *Research and Analysis Project for Afghanistan-Pakistan Hands - Cohort 1*, 30.

³⁰ Cohee and Wilkinson, *Research and Analysis Project for Afghanistan-Pakistan Hands - Cohort 1*, 30.

Phase Four is 16 weeks of pure language training that boosts the Hand from an elementary level to a limited working proficiency of the language. Phase Five—the last phase—is the second deployment. Ideally, the Hands return to the same regional advisory position they held during their initial deployment to rekindle or continue the relationship they previously built. However, the management cell within the Joint Staff “will also take into account rank, operational skill-set, Service, and experience when determining the next billet, and some Hands will be placed in higher-level positions...to take advantage of their increased expertise.”³¹

Synthesizing the LREC Knowledge and Proficiency Requirement

Language, regional and cultural skills are enduring warfighting competencies that are critical to mission readiness in today’s dynamic global environment. Our forces must have the ability to effectively communicate with and understand the cultures of coalition forces, international partners, and local populations.

~ Leon Panetta, former Secretary of Defense

The LREC understanding combined with the direct infusion of in-country on-the-job training are the essence of the Hands program. However, this unique combination of skills takes many years to develop and can atrophy if neglected. In this section, I will compare the Foreign Area Officers (FAO) program to that of AfPak Hands. The FAO program—unlike the Hands program—is ideally a longer-term journey that continues to build a depth and breadth of expertise in the FAO’s respective region through most of an officer’s career. According to the DoD: “The FAO is the Department’s uniformed expert who possesses a unique combination of strategic focus, regional expertise, cultural awareness, and foreign language proficiency.”³² Through sustained interaction and education, the FAO builds a “unique understanding of political-military relationships and cultural norms...FAOs are recognized throughout the Combatant Commands and the Joint Staff as indispensable assets.”³³ They are currently abroad in more than 130 countries and maintain “familiarity with political, cultural, sociological, economic, and geographical factors of a region, and professional proficiency in one or more of the

³¹ Cohee and Wilkinson, *Research and Analysis Project for Afghanistan-Pakistan Hands - Cohort 1*, 30.

³² Department of Defense (DoD), *Department of Defense Foreign Area Officer Program Report for Fiscal Year 2011*, 5.

³³ Department of Defense (DoD), *Department of Defense Foreign Area Officer Program Report for Fiscal Year 2011*, 46.

dominant languages in their region of expertise.”³⁴ FAOs primarily serve as staff officers and advisors to key national and military leaders in the U.S. and abroad. They are instrumental in promoting security cooperation and building partnerships in various regions around the globe.

Language

The language requirement—the ability to read, write, listen, and speak—for both the FAO and the Hand is the bedrock of their interaction. It enables them to make meaningful first contact with the local population, build credibility, and access and interpret information. The language proficiency of both programs is measured against the descriptive standards established by the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR).

The ILR is an “unfunded Federal interagency organization established for the coordination and sharing of information about language-related activities at the Federal level.”³⁵ ILR is not a testing organization; it was established in the late 1950s by the U.S. to develop a standard language scale for government agencies when assessing and tracking foreign language proficiency. The skill-level descriptions, the six-part scale the ILR founded, is used by many agencies “in scoring language proficiency tests and assigning scores, but each test is different;” individual agencies are responsible for testing their respective individuals.³⁶ The current standard, codified by the ILR in 1985, is used to assess the language ability of both the FAO and Hands programs. It consists of a descriptive six skill-level pyramid that corresponds to the “typical stages in the development of competence in most commonly taught languages.” The levels include: (0) No Proficiency, (1) Elementary Proficiency, (2) Limited Working Proficiency, (3) General Professional Proficiency, (4) Advanced Professional Proficiency, and (5) Functionally Native Proficiency.³⁷

Between Afghanistan and Pakistan alone, there are more than 40 different languages or dialects. The Hands program has narrowed those down to four primary

³⁴ Department of Defense (DoD), *Department of Defense Foreign Area Officer Program Report for Fiscal Year 2011*, 1.

³⁵ “Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR): History,” n.d., <http://www.govtilr.org/IRL%20History.htm>.

³⁶ “Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR): History.”

³⁷ “Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR): Skill,” n.d., <http://www.govtilr.org/Skills/ILRscale4.htm>.

languages that are spoken in the region: Dari, Pashtu, Urdu, and English. In Pakistan, Urdu is the national unifying language, although English is commonly known, taught in school, and used in government. The intent of the Hands program is to build general understanding of the language to serve as an initial icebreaker. Taught and tested by the Defense Language Institute (DLI) using an oral interview and grading against the ILR proficiency levels, the Hands program's goal after the first phase of training is Level-1, or Elementary Proficiency. Approximately 82 percent of Hands have achieved the elementary proficiency prior to their first deployment. Upon completion of Phase Two (first deployment) and Three (staff/school) the Hand will enter a Phase Four (dedicated language training program) with the goal of attaining a Level-2 ILR, a Limited Working Proficiency, prior to his or her second and final deployment (Phase Five).³⁸

The FAO program—like the Hands of old—is much more language intensive than the contemporary Hands program. When it comes to language, the FAO is very similar to the Old China Hand in that it comprises the bulk of a career instead of a small portion of it. Once selected to become an FAO, an officer is required to develop “foreign language skills in one or more of the predominant languages used by the populations of the countries or regions in which they specialize.”³⁹ When comparing it to the AfPak Hands program, the FAO's South Asia Region encompasses both Afghanistan and Pakistan among others, and requires proficiency in at least one of the eight dominant languages in that region. Within the eight languages, Pashto, Dari, and Urdu are all represented. If an FAO is selected for the South Asia region with a Pashto language concentration, he or she attends a 47-week course at the Defense Language Institute (DLI) to achieve an ILR Level-2 or better, with a DoD FAO program goal of Level-3 (General Professional Proficiency).⁴⁰ The DoD's last published annual report, from 2011, reported nearly half (48 percent) of all (2,213) DoD FAOs achieved a Level 3 proficiency or higher.⁴¹

³⁸ Cohee and Wilkinson, *Research and Analysis Project for Afghanistan-Pakistan Hands - Cohort 1*, 27.

³⁹ Department of Defense Instruction (DoDI) 1315.20, “Management of Department of Defense (DoD) Foreign Area Officer (FAO) Programs: 1315.20” (Department of Defense Instruction (DoDI), September 28, 2007), 8.

⁴⁰ Department of Defense (DoD), *Department of Defense Foreign Area Officer Program Report for Fiscal Year 2011*, 3.

⁴¹ Department of Defense (DoD), *Department of Defense Foreign Area Officer Program Report for Fiscal Year 2011*, 8.

Regional Expertise & Culture

If actions at the tactical level have direct political effect, they need to be planned with that in mind.... If one fails to understand one's environment in its own political terms, one does not know what political effect one will have. Military action gains an element of lottery.

Hands, like FAOs, are strategic enablers; they not only advise at the strategic level of war but are also employed at the operational and tactical levels. To be most effective, the Hands require a geopolitical understanding of the region in which they operate. If unable to frame their actions within the greater geopolitical context, their actions gain an element of lottery as mentioned in the above quote by Emile Simpson, a contemporary Irregular Warfare theorist. Regional expertise as defined by the Defense Language Program consists of: "Graduate level education or 40 semester hours of study focusing on but not limited to the political, cultural, sociological, economic, and geographic factors of a foreign country or specific global region...or equivalent regional expertise gained through documented previous experience."⁴² Unless someone enters the Hands program with a significant amount of previous experience in either Afghanistan or Pakistan, this definition makes it difficult to claim Regional Expertise. What makes it more difficult is the lack of a measurement tool to assess accurately regional and cultural expertise. The DoD expands further on its expectation for expertise with six specific areas of competency the regional expert should demonstrate: "An individual's awareness and understanding of the historical, political, cultural (including linguistic and religious), sociological (including demographic), economic, and geographic factors of a foreign country or specific global region."⁴³ Unlike with language proficiency, commonly expressed using the ILR scale, there is no codified proficiency descriptors for regional or cultural expertise.

For both the Hands and FAOs, regional expertise comes in the form of education and on-the-job training. Hands receive dedicated training in a very compressed timeline throughout a three-to-four year period. In contrast, those chosen for the FAO program

⁴² Department of Defense Directive (DoDD) 5160.41E, "Defense Language Program (DLP)" (Department of Defense (DoD), October 21, 2005), <http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/pdf/516041p.pdf>, 2.

⁴³ Department of Defense Instruction (DoDI) 5160.70, "Management of DoD Language and Regional Proficiency Capabilities" (Department of Defense (DoD), June 12, 2007), <http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/pdf/516070p.pdf>, 4.

embark on a fuller developmental program that shapes and guides the officer's career and assignments to build the required expertise. Officers are identified at the mid-career point for the FAO program "designed to deliberately develop officers with international skill."⁴⁴ The DoD instructs Services to manage and "provide for language and regional expertise maintenance and enhancement training programs throughout the lifecycle career of an FAO.... The goal is to attain and maintain FAO language skills [ILR Level 3] and regional expertise at the professional-level."⁴⁵

The Defense Language and National Security Education Office (DLNSEO) has recently implemented a few initiatives to develop regional and cultural expertise training and assessment mechanisms. The Virtual Cultural Awareness Trainer (VCAT) is a web-based virtual reality tool that spawned from an Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) initiative to develop technology-based training tools. Its purpose is to bolster the intercultural competence of service members deploying overseas, by helping "learners quickly and efficiently develop operational cultural knowledge, and acquire cultural skills".⁴⁶ Currently, 11 VCAT courses are available to transport students, through virtual means, to various regions and cultures around the world. The regions currently available in VCAT courses include: Afghanistan, Africa, South and Central America, Hispaniola, The Caribbean, Southeast Asia, and Taiwan.⁴⁷ In addition to building cultural expertise, there is also an initiative—still in development and testing—to assess the regional expertise of our culturally astute service members.

The DLNSEO commissioned the University of Maryland's Center for Advanced Study of Language (CASL) to develop a method to assess regional expertise. Although not operational yet, the Regional Proficiency Assessment Tool (RPAT) is "designed to measure the regional proficiency of the military workforce and will allow the DoD to assess, track, and manage the regional proficiency of its military personnel, enhancing its

⁴⁴ Air Force Instruction (AFI) 16-109, "Air Force International Affairs Program" (Secretary of the Air Force Publishing, 3 Sep 10), 3.

⁴⁵ Department of Defense Instruction (DoDI) 1315.20, "DoDI 1315.20," 8.

⁴⁶ W. Lewis Johnson et al., "The Virtual Cultural Awareness Trainer (VCAT): Joint Knowledge Online's (JKO's) Solution to the Individual Operational Culture and Language Training Gap" (Joint Knowledge Development and Distribution Capability, Joint Warfighting Center, U.S. Joint Forces Command, 2011); "Joint Knowledge Online (JKO): VCAT" (Joint Knowledge Development and Distribution Capability, June 2009), <http://jko.jfcom.mil>.

⁴⁷ "Virtual Cultural Awareness Trainer (VCAT)," *Alelo*, 2015, <http://dodsupport.alelo.com/virtual-cultural-awareness-trainer-vcat-africa-afghanistan-south-central-america-hispaniola-caribbea>.

ability to meet operational and surge requirements.”⁴⁸ Similar to the ILR proficiency levels, the RPAT rating provides a six-point proficiency scale “that reflects the relevance for the region of the respondent’s knowledge and experience.”⁴⁹ The rating takes into account five inputs from an RPAT Questionnaire composed of ten sections: (1) International experience, (2) Study of the region, (3) Experience in the region, (4) Language, and (5) Critical thinking. The respondent will receive five individual scores that correspond to the inputs previously stated and one overall RPAT score that can be used by the DoD to manage its LREC human capital.⁵⁰ The tool separates the globe into 15 world regions as approved by the DoD’s Defense Language Steering Committee.⁵¹ The scoping and defining of regions can be problematic and will be discussed in depth in a later section of this chapter.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates wrote in his memoir, “I was reminded that nearly always we begin military engagements—wars—profoundly ignorant about our adversaries and the situation on the ground.”⁵² Both the VCAT and the RPAT are important steps towards improving upon the military’s record of cultural ignorance. The DoD must have the ability to improve the regional expertise of its culturally attuned warriors in a cost-effective manner. It is also necessary to assess, track and manage their ability to interact effectively within a culturally diverse environment. As the saying goes, you never get a second chance to make a good first impression. By not only bolstering the regional and cultural expertise, but also the Department’s ability to assess, track and manage personnel who possess the unique complement of LREC skills, the DoD gains a powerful ability to deploy the right person for the right job at the right time.

The Right Time ... Operational Phases

Time is of the essence. When developing strategy it is not only important to determine what the desired objectives (ends) are, and how (ways) the U.S. will use the

⁴⁸ George Reinhart et al., “Assessing Regional Proficiency” (University of Maryland: Center for Advanced Study of Language, September 2011).

⁴⁹ “The Regional Proficiency Assessment Tool (RPAT)” (University of Maryland: Center for Advanced Study of Language, May 2014), 2.

⁵⁰ “The Regional Proficiency Assessment Tool (RPAT),” 3.

⁵¹ “The Regional Proficiency Assessment Tool (RPAT),” 4.

⁵² Joseph Adams et al., *Enhancing and Managing Regionally Oriented Individuals and Organizations* (Institute for Defense Analyses, June 2014), 27.

available resources (means) to achieve those objectives, but also to determine the operating environment that is most beneficial to our strategy. In the case of the AfPak Hands program, the truncated timeline, based on the reactive implementation of the program, repressed the program's development. It not only affected the Chairman's ability to get the Services to understand the significance of the program and to gain their buy-in, but it also inhibited General McChrystal's ability, as the Senior Commander for operations in Afghanistan, to educate and subsequently get buy-in from the Coalition and its Commanders down-range. The program was further inhibited in June 2010 when General McChrystal was relieved of duty for openly criticizing the Afghanistan strategy that was endorsed by the White House. The President stated that General McChrystal's actions 'undermine the civilian control of the military that is at the core of our democratic system.'⁵³ The loss of the primary in-theater program advocate less than 10 months after the first AfPak Cohort began training and 2 months after the first Cohort arrived in Afghanistan led to a chaotic start to the program.⁵⁴

Much of the turmoil that ensued when the AfPak Hands were first employed was a product of the compressed timeline that did not enable a proper understanding of how and where to most effectively employ the Hands. The Hands program was developed for full-spectrum engagement through key advisory positions at the tactical through the strategic levels of war. However, the lack of understanding from Coalition Commanders saw this new program as a manpower boost and a solution to their previously unfilled Request For Forces (RFFs). In addition to a lack of understanding, there was also a lack of quality control when validating the specialized billets; more than 80 percent were incorrect which led to the inappropriate placement and misuse of the Hand's very specialized training. A short personal experience of an AfPak hand elucidates the turmoil many of them experienced during the initial phases of their deployment:

[The] biggest problem I saw when General McChrystal started this program in the AOR was that not all Commanders understood the implementation concept for AfPak Hands, and too many looked at it as

⁵³ "Obama Relieves McChrystal of Command," News Media, *Military on NBC News.com*, (June 23, 2010), http://www.nbcnews.com/id/37866754/ns/us_news-military/t/obama-relieves-mcchrystal-command/.

⁵⁴ CAPT Russell McLachlan, USN (Former AfPak Hands Program Manager, U.S. Forces Afghanistan), interviewed by the author, 4 Feb 15.

a...continuity grab for their manning. Commanders saw it as an opportunity to better their continuity through exploiting the 12-month deployment of the Hand. The analogy goes that a Commander was ordering a pizza that was showing up a year later for the next Commander to eat—[it soon] became apparent that not everyone likes sausage and mushrooms. Naturally, the new Commander would say “who the hell is this AfPak guy showing up? I am using him for XX, I do not care what special training he has or language he speaks, because I have this staff position to fill,” and subsequently place him in jobs that did not meet the AfPak program’s intent. That did not go well for a lot of Hands... Is it not best we put the wheels on the bike before it is moving rather than after the motion has started?...The time to start is before the shooting starts. Does a program like this need to have some fancy ‘Hand’ title for the concept of cultural understanding/advising/liaisoning to be effective? I think not. But the right people are critical, with the right expertise and network connections, as they always are. And the building of trusting relationships with the subject countrymen is needed, and that takes time.⁵⁵

Program development and more cultural experience may quell the turbulence noted by the Hand, but clearly, time is a key variable in the success of a Hands-like program and the best time to develop and employ the program is well before the conflict starts.

Joint doctrine provides an operational phasing model as a starting point for planning purposes. It consists of six phases for use by the strategist and is “not intended to be a universally prescriptive template for all conceivable joint operations and may be tailored to the character and duration of the operation to which it applies.” The six phases include: (0) Shape, (I) Deter, (II) Seize the initiative, (III) Dominate, (IV) Stabilize, and (V) Enable civil authority. They provide a framework for identifying and delineating the current or future state of operations and provide “a way to conduct a complex joint operation in manageable parts...and synchronize related activities, thereby enhancing flexibility and unity of effort during execution.”⁵⁶ The optimal time to deploy a Hands-like program is in Operational Phases 0 (Shape), IV (Stabilize) and V (Enable).

⁵⁵ Interview with Major from AfPak Hands program, 7 Feb 2015. (Unattributed Interview #7) Follow-up conducted on 11 February 2015. Interviewee has had multiple deployments and has been associated with the program from 2009-2015.

⁵⁶ Joint Publication (JP) 5-0; “Joint Operations Planning” (Joint Chiefs of Staff, August 11, 2011), http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp5_0.pdf, III-36 and XXIV.

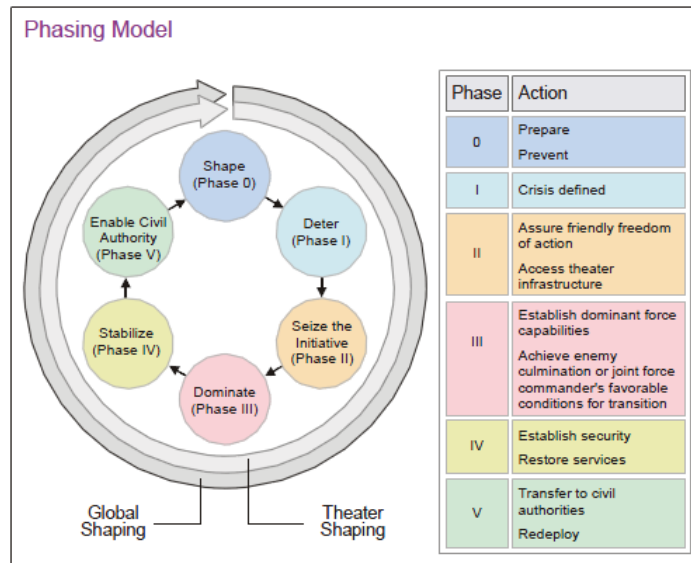


Figure 1: The Operational Phasing Model

Source: Joint Publication (JP) 5-0: “Joint Operations Planning” (Joint Chiefs of Staff, August 11, 2011), http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp5_0.pdf, III-36 and XXIV.

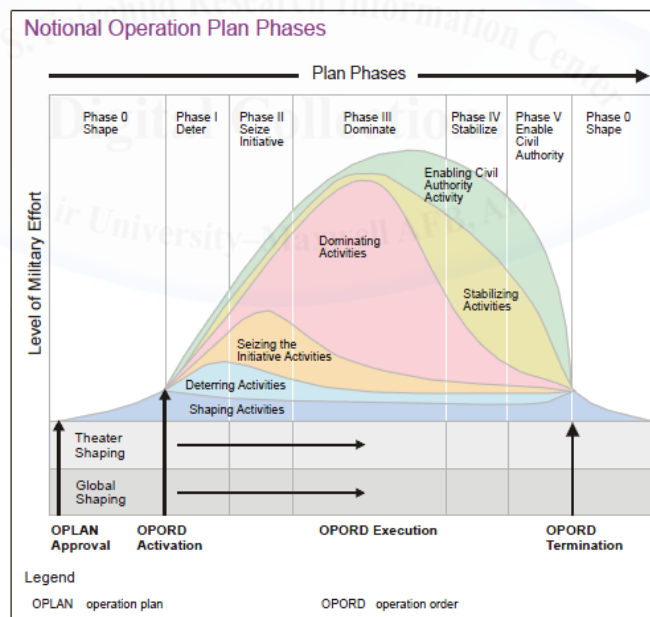


Figure 2: Notional Operation Plan Phases

Source: Joint Publication (JP) 5-0: “Joint Operations Planning” (Joint Chiefs of Staff, August 11, 2011), http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp5_0.pdf, III-36 and XXIV.

Shaping—Phase Zero—is ideally suited to a Hand-like operation as seen with the China Hands program of the twentieth century. In a peacetime environment, the department in which the Hands’ work—in this case, the U.S. State Department—can take a proactive approach because time is on its side. The Department can recruit individuals

with the proper interest and aptitude for the program. Additionally, Phase Zero allows for an uncompressed training timeline and lengthy in-country immersion to maximize the effectiveness of each Hand. It also gives the program time to establish roots within the Joint Staff, educate Service components and users in the AOR, and most importantly build and scrutinize the manning billets to maximize effectiveness with partner nations. In short, a Phase Zero operation is best suited to manage resource constraints—namely time and manpower.

Time is a significant influence on strategy development and execution. Everett Dolman captured in his book *Pure Strategy* that: “All strategy is necessarily shaped by time.”⁵⁷ A strategist can only predict, with limited certainty, when and if a conflict will arise; however, in strategy an educated prediction is necessary. After turmoil erupts, it is too late; options are then limited and the decision maker is pressed to take action; thus “time itself is a diminishing commodity; it flows past and is lost.”⁵⁸ Successful prediction can equate to control of the situation by increasing the amount of time the strategist and decision makers have to adapt and react. In addition to time as a resource, another salient influence on strategy is manpower. As the U.S. pivots its strategic focus to the Asia-Pacific, the time to develop and employ a Hands program is now—by leveraging time we can make the best use of manpower.

After two very costly wars, the U.S. military is currently in a period of drawdown, and human capital—our most precious resource—is dwindling. However, our national security initiatives and interests overseas are not declining. A 2013 study, conducted by the Center for a New American Security, claimed: “The nation expects to sustain its global responsibilities but will be challenged to do so with fewer defense resources.”⁵⁹ The result of the force structure reductions and the upholding of international security commitments should motivate U.S. decisions makers to employ resources smartly; precisely because “problems previously solved with infusion of more resources will now

⁵⁷ Everett C Dolman, *Pure Strategy: Power and Principle in the Space and Information Age* (London; New York: Frank Cass, 2005), 152.

⁵⁸ Dolman, *Pure Strategy*, 153.

⁵⁹ David Barno et al., *Building Better Generals* (Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security, October 2013), www.cnas.org, 32.

demand innovative thinking and creative management.”⁶⁰ Phase Zero operations are well suited to assist in times like these but they require an enduring investment.

In Tyrone Groh’s and Richard Bailey’s article, *Fighting More Fires with Less Water*, they attack the question: “With limited and shrinking budgets, how should the U.S. balance efforts to *prepare for war* versus efforts to *prevent war*?” To answer this question they aptly argue two points. The first is that “military leaders must conceptualize Phase Zero operations more broadly...as a complex, long-term, grand preventative strategy;” the second contends that to make the most efficient use of U.S. assets “planners should seek indicators for potential leverage points.” Groh and Bailey claimed: “These efforts will not prevent every conflict, but they should reduce the number of conflicts and preserve resources for when they are needed most.”⁶¹ Their argument fits nicely into a proactive Hands program that employs in a Phase Zero environment. The purpose of a Hand is to operate in a culturally diverse area; that area should be selected and prioritized based on its strategic importance. The Hand’s expertise in the LREC of the area combined with the long-term immersion in the area’s culture puts him or her in a position to interact and develop strategic partnerships within the host nation. This process is more conducive before conflict arises and can in some cases prevent conflict before it starts; the Hand acts as an on-site fire extinguisher to quell misunderstanding and promote peaceful solutions without a large U.S. intervention. Groh and Bailey highlight this method of using Phase Zero operations to retain American resources by “focusing on efforts that minimize conflict—or, just as importantly, the American role in conflicts.”⁶² They continue by emphasizing, “Phase Zero operations cultivate relationships in places where we can count on partners for support in areas important, but not necessarily vital, to U.S. national interests.”⁶³ In later chapters, as I discuss the vast and diverse nature of the Asia-Pacific, the strategic value of Phase Zero operations—in a resource-constrained environment—becomes increasingly clear.

⁶⁰ Barno et al., *Building Better Generals*, 9.

⁶¹ Tyrone Groh and Richard Bailey, Jr., “Fighting More Fires with Less Water: Phase Zero and Modified Operational Design,” *Joint Forces Quarterly* 77, no. 2nd Quarter (April 2015): 101–8, 102.

⁶² Groh and Bailey, Jr., “Fighting More Fires with Less Water,” 103.

⁶³ Groh and Bailey, Jr., “Fighting More Fires with Less Water,” 103.

Once a cohort of Hands is established and maintained in the region—during Phase Zero operations—they have the LREC expertise to assist and provide counsel in all future operations within that region. After Phase Zero, instability in the region grows significantly and can hamper the Hands’ ability to interact in the population due to security concerns or polarization. The next opportunity to operate freely happens once the use of force starts to dwindle (Phase IV); however, trust and credibility may be much harder to achieve at this point than they were in Phase Zero.

In the Stabilization Phase—Phase IV—there is some operational effectiveness of a Hands-like program, but not as optimal as in Phase Zero. This phase is focused on establishing security and restoring services, and typically occurs at the tail end of a conflict. Implementing a Hands program at this point will have limited effectiveness and is most likely a reactive approach to cultural ineptness or miscommunications during previous phases of operations. The AfPak Hands program was implemented during Phase IV operations and continues today. Many security concerns and ongoing conflicts continue to hamper the program’s ability to act freely among the people. Many Hands are paired with military units and contractors for security purposes.⁶⁴ It is quite possible that inter-cultural relationships have already been strained and thus the application of a Hands-like program is a band aid to repair those relationships, an approach which may lead to initial distrust and limited credibility. If this is the case, the implementation of a Hands program will most likely be rushed, leading to sub-optimal participant qualifications and motivation. In addition, security concerns and force protection measures may inhibit Hands from interacting with the local population as much as needed, thus limiting their effect at all levels of the operation (Tactical-Operational-Strategic). The higher risk areas equate to a more entrenched attitude and bureaucratic approval process for movement with locals. Ongoing conflict and the risk of casualty inhibit the ability of Hands to have free interaction with the locals—a prominent attribute to the process of building trust and lasting relationships.

Enable—Phase V—operations are very similar to the previous phase, but the operating environment will become more conducive to a Hands-like program as the

⁶⁴ Interview with LtCol from AfPak Hands program, 9 Feb 15. (Unattributed Interview #6)

conflict continues to wane. This phase will purposefully enable local authorities and transfer control. Security will be less stringent and thus allow the Hands to utilize their LREC expertise as the area and operations slowly transition full-circle back to a post-conflict Phase Zero operation. It is useful at this point to continue to build non-obtrusive relationships and intergovernmental partnerships with the host-nation as it transitions back to normalcy and a peaceful environment.

A proactive approach to security is better than a reactive one, and a Hands-like program—if used proactively—can help synergize culture and strategy in a resource-constrained environment. Thus, a Phase Zero environment is much more conducive to building relationships and fostering partnerships than a post-conflict environment such as Phases IV or V. The key to a proactive Hands approach to leverage Phase Zero opportunities is to identify areas of interest to make the best use of manpower. In May 2012, Chairman Dempsey expressed his satisfaction with the AfPak Hands model and its ability to “improve the quality, continuity and engagement in key positions in and out of theater.”⁶⁵ With that in mind, he took a proactive step in-line with the President’s proclamation to re-focus strategically on the Asia-Pacific by announcing that, “as we rebalance our strategic focus, I have directed the Joint Staff to begin exploration of a Hands-like program focused on the Asia-Pacific region.”⁶⁶ That announcement brought the Hands program full circle to its place of birth in the Far East region.

The Rest of the Story ... Old China Hands

The Old China Hands were well versed in the language, region, and culture of China. Implemented well before the Second World War—in a Shaping (Phase Zero) environment—the program was given the strategic access to provide input, and it had the potential to influence U.S. policy concerning China. However, the free speech and access to government officials that came with the territory of being an Old China Hand also brought controversy. The Hands saw Mao Tse-tung’s Communist party much stronger than Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist party and the eventual rulers of China. They

⁶⁵ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) CM-0121-12, “Pakistan-Afghanistan Coordination Cell and Afghanistan-Pakistan Hands Program” (Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, May 22, 2012).

⁶⁶ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) CM-0121-12, “CM-0121-12.”

reported “that Chiang was not the embodiment of China, that the Nationalist government was corrupt and in crisis, that the Communists had built up popular support of a magnitude and depth [that] made their elimination impossible, and that Mao’s followers were likely to become the dominant force in China within a comparatively short time.”⁶⁷ This view did not fit the official policy or the strategic narrative of the U.S. as policy makers sought a strategy of containment against the spread of Communism. In 1949, when Mao’s Communist army prevailed in China and he became the Chairman of the Central People’s Government, the Hands were accused of losing China and “sabotage against the Nationalists, disloyalty to the United States, and treason for disclosing secret Allied plans to the Communists.”⁶⁸ The Hands were strategically placed in China armed with a unique capability to interact, build partnerships, and affect the strategic calculus on the ground. They were also persecuted by the same government that put them there because the reality as witnessed by those in China did not match the vision of the bureaucracy that resided 7,000 miles away.

Comparing past to present, this chapter started with the origin of the Hands program in the Far-East and then transitioned to its contemporary version in Afghanistan and Pakistan. I outlined the mission, vision and training program of the AfPak Hands, and then compared the LREC knowledge and proficiency in the Hand and FAO programs. Language emerged as the bedrock of each program and currently the only portion of LREC with an effective characterization of proficiency—the ILR. However, with the increased importance of these unique capabilities, there are initiatives underway to rectify this shortcoming, such as the Virtual Cultural Awareness Trainer (VCAT) and the Regional Proficiency Assessment Tool (RPAT). In addition, the FAO—unlike the Hand—is a long-term journey and is treated and trained as such, leading to much higher proficiency expectations. Lastly, this chapter explored how timing, through an operationally phased approach, is critical to the implementation of cultural strategic endeavors. A proactive approach worked in the favor of development and employment of the China Hands; whereas, the reactive nature of the AfPak Hands inhibited its growth and utilization. If timing as an employment factor is unaccounted for prior to the use of a

⁶⁷ Lauren, *The China Hands’ Legacy*, 17.

⁶⁸ Lauren, *The China Hands’ Legacy*, 17.

FAO or Hand, this oversight can undermine the effectiveness of a strategic program that depends on building credible, trusting partnerships. The next chapter will focus on a second critical piece of the implementation of a Hands program—specifically, what defines a region, and for APAC Hands, the geographic enormity and cultural diversity of the Asia-Pacific’s region as a whole. Then, it will analyze a few of the primary countries of strategic importance to the U.S. in the Asia-Pacific to compare the feasibility of a regional Hands program in the Asia-Pacific to that of a country-centric Hands model in Afghanistan-Pakistan.



Chapter 5

Bounding Cultures ... Defining a Region

The term region, similar to the definition of culture, can be very nebulous and open to interpretation. The term can also acquire the attributes of a child's Slinky toy, expanding or contracting based on the needs of the individual or organization that defines it. According to Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary a region is: "an administrative area, division, or district...an indefinite area of the world or universe...a broad geographic area distinguished by similar features...a sphere of activity or interest."¹ We can further define a region using the *Encyclopedia of National Geographic* as "an area of land that has common features...also defined by natural or artificial features... Language, government, or religion can define a region, as can forests, wildlife, or climate."² These very broad definitions are further muddled when we look at an official definition provided by the DoD; it bounds a geographic area in accordance with the Unified Command Plan (UCP).

The UCP is a classified document, approved by the President, which "delineates the general geographical area of responsibility (AOR) for geographic combatant commanders."³ The UCP, reviewed and updated at a minimum every two years, is maintained and prepared by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS).⁴ The Geographic Combatant Command (GCC) regions published by the UCP include: Africa Command, Central Command, European Command, Northern Command, Pacific Command, and Southern Command.⁵ Beyond that, the bounding and interpretation of a region are delegated to individual Service components for programs such as Hands or FAOs. Below is a diagram showing the regional layout of the GCCs.⁶

¹ Merriam-Webster, Inc, ed., *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed (Springfield, Mass: Merriam-Webster, Inc, 2003), 1048.

² "Region," Education, *National Geographic*, (2015 1996), http://education.nationalgeographic.com/education/encyclopedia/region/?ar_a=1.

³ Joint Publication (JP) 1-02, "Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms," November 8, 2010, http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp1_02.pdf, 385.

⁴ Andrew Feickert, *The Unified Command Plan and Combatant Commands: Background and Issues for Congress* (Congressional Research Service, January 3, 2013), 1.

⁵ Feickert, *The Unified Command Plan and Combatant Commands: Background and Issues for Congress*, 3.

⁶ "Unified Command Plan," Government, *U.S. Department of Defense*, (2011), <http://www.defense.gov/ucc/>.

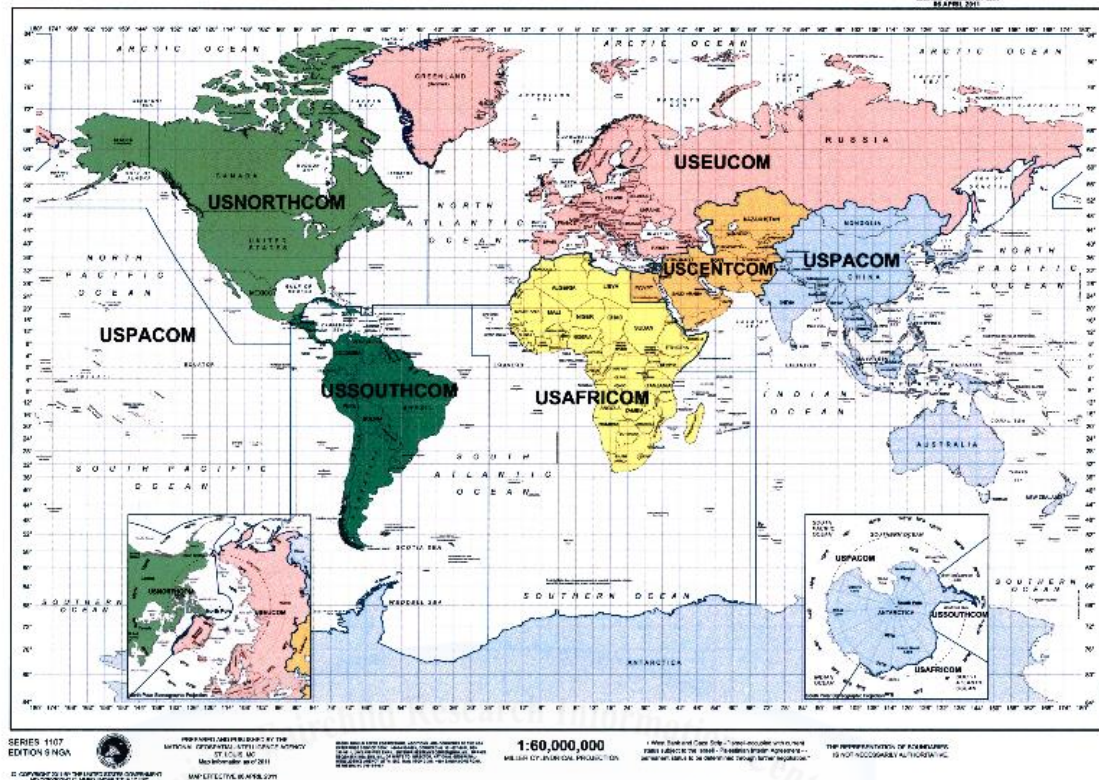


Figure 3: Geographic Combatant Command World View

Source: “Unified Command Plan,” Government, *U.S. Department of Defense*, (2011), <http://www.defense.gov/ucc/>.

Not all government organizations are created equally. To stir up the muddy water a little more, the U.S. Department of State also has its own regional breakdown—different from the regional breakout published by the UCP—which encompasses six regions for the United Nations and Other International Organizations. The six regions include: (1) Africa (sub-Sahara), (2) East Asia and the Pacific, (3) Europe and Eurasia, (4) Near East (North Africa and the Middle East), (5) South and Central Asia, and (6) Western Hemisphere.⁷ With so many different definitions, the Service components have been forced to define the boundaries that work best for them.

A recent study conducted by the Institute for Defense Analyses asserted that the “Services’ approaches to preparing individuals and organizations for missions with tasks that have to be executed in or focusing on other regions of the world vary widely.”⁸ As

⁷ “Diplomacy In Action: Regions,” *U.S. Department of State*, 2015, <http://www.state.gov/countries/>.

⁸ Adams et al., *Enhancing and Managing Regionally Oriented Individuals and Organizations*, 38.

mentioned earlier, the Department's new Virtual Cultural Awareness Trainer (VCAT) has a 15-Region breakdown. Put simply, the DoD has not codified a standardized, bounded, and thus actionable definition of a geographic region outside the UCP for use by the individual Service components. This has encouraged each Service to publish its tailored guidance when it comes to bounding a geographic territory. For example, the Air Force uses a "Regional Shredout" for use with its culture and language focus; it consists of nine geographic regions: Eurasia, Latin America, Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, Middle East/North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, Europe, South Asia, and China.⁹ The Army also uses the same nine-region structure, which is further divided into the dominant languages within that region to set the requirements for Foreign Area Officers.¹⁰ The Marines use an eight-region breakout, choosing not to split the Continent of Africa and not to separate China from its Northeast Asia region.¹¹ Strategic regional guidance such as the Asia-Pacific pivot and the development of an Asia-Pacific Hands program is where the two predominant regional designators—UCP and Service LREC—can complicate strategy formulation and regional employment.

The Asia-Pacific & PACOM

The countries within a GCC may not align with strategic guidance, which in turn may not align with the Service's LREC focus areas. The Army states in its governing publication that "officers trained in one AOC may be assigned to work in another, based on their language, experience, and/or the needs of the Army."¹² The Asia-Pacific pivot, which shifted the strategic focus of the U.S. from Afghanistan to the Far East, is a prime example of this phenomenon. In practice, this shift has come to fruition through the employment of AfPak Hands to the development of the Asia-Pacific (APAC) Hands program. The Asia-Pacific, a region that does not align neatly with either the UCP designated Pacific Command (PACOM) or the Service's "Regional Shredout," is a hybrid of five of the nine Service component-designated regions and extends beyond the 36 countries that fall under the responsibility of PACOM.

⁹ Air Force Instruction (AFI) 16-109, "AFI 16-109-1," 16-17.

¹⁰ Department of the Army Pamphlet 600-3, "Commissioned Officer Professional Development and Career Management" (Headquarters Department of the Army, December 3, 2014), http://www.apd.army.mil/jw2/xmldemo/p600_3/head.asp, 277.

¹¹ Marine Corps Order 1520.11F, "International Affairs Program (IAP)" (Department of the Navy, March 27, 2013), 8.

¹² Department of the Army Pamphlet 600-3, "DA Pamphlet 600-3," 277.

According to the Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, a DoD institution for furthering security cooperation between nations, the Asia-Pacific includes 47 independent nations and two French territories—French Polynesia and New Caledonia.¹³ The 11 other countries not included in PACOM’s AOR include: three from Africa Command (Comoros, Madagascar, and Mauritius), two from Northern Command (U.S. and Canada), two from Southern Command (Chile and Peru), two small island nations governed by New Zealand (Cook Islands and Niue), one from European Command (Russia), and one from Central Command (Pakistan).¹⁴ Overall, the preponderance of the countries in and around the Pacific Ocean are encompassed within PACOM’s AOR.



Figure 4: United States Pacific Command Area of Responsibility

Source: United States Pacific Command (USPACOM) Website, Area of Responsibility

The Regions within the Region

The region is home to more than 4 billion people and some of the fastest growing cities in the world. By 2020, 13 of the world’s 25 megacities, most of them situated in coastal areas, will be in Asia and the Pacific.

U.S. PACOM is what most service members think of when one mentions the Asia-Pacific. As shown in previous paragraphs, the Command is not as clearly aligned

¹³ “Countries of the Asia-Pacific Region,” *Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies*, accessed February 10, 2015, <http://www.apcss.org/about-2/ap-countries/>.

¹⁴ “USPACOM Strategy,” Government, *U.S. Pacific Command*, (2015), <http://www.pacom.mil/AboutUSPACOM/USPACOMStrategy.aspx>; “Countries of the Asia-Pacific Region.”

with other Asia-Pacific regional definitions as one would expect. The enormous geographic area of the regions may be the prime reason for the various interpretations. In addition to the expansive territory covered, the Asia-Pacific region is also the home of our most culturally diverse GCC. PACOM consists of over 36 nations that contain more than 50 percent of the world's population, over 3,000 different languages, several of the world's largest militaries, and five nations allied with the U.S. through mutual defense treaties.¹⁵ However, the ever-increasing multipolarity of the Asia-Pacific region lacks a well-anchored regional security framework and constitutes one of the largest global security challenges that the U.S. faces today.¹⁶ Developing enduring regional relationships built upon cultural competence and interoperability are essential for the U.S. to build effective strategic partnerships within the Asia-Pacific region. Partnership building starts with understanding the regions (Asia and Oceania) within the Asia-Pacific region that make up U.S. PACOM.

Decoding Asia

Asia is the world's largest continent with over 17 million square miles of territory and over 4.3 billion people—over two-thirds of the world's population.¹⁷ Asia is the most culturally diverse region on the planet and is where “many of the world's major religions originated.” Many, but not all, of the 48 independent nations of Asia fall within the scope of PACOM, including two of the largest and most diverse nations of the world—China and India.¹⁸ They are two of the most culturally complex nations and major powers in the region, which make them an integral part of the strategic calculus concerning the U.S. pivot to the Asia-Pacific.

China is the fourth largest country in the world in terms of geography (slightly smaller than the U.S.) and with nearly 1.4 billion people ranks first in terms of population. China's size and geographic location make it extremely diverse in climate,

¹⁵ “About USPACOM: United States Pacific Command,” Government, *U.S. Pacific Command*, accessed February 12, 2015, <http://www.pacom.mil/AboutUSPACOM.aspx>.

¹⁶ U.S. Air Force, “Air Force Strategic Environment Assessment (AFSEA) 2014-2034” (US Air Force, 2014), 13.

¹⁷ Population Reference Bureau, “2014 World Population Data Sheet” (Population Reference Bureau (PRB), 2015), <http://www.prb.org/Publications/Datasheets/2014/2014-world-population-data-sheet/data-sheet.aspx>.

¹⁸ James Davis, “Asia - CultureGram” (Brigham Young University: Department of Geography, 2015), www.culturegrams.com.

terrain, and culture.¹⁹ Its climate ranges from a tropical south to a sub-arctic north. The terrain features the Himalaya Mountains, the Tibetan Plateau, and subtropical islands.²⁰ Both the climate and the terrain create the home for 56 officially recognized ethnic groups that use a dialect or language from their respective geographical region; although 15 of those groups have more than 1 million people, each of the people with the groups will bring their beliefs, values, behaviors, and norms to every social interaction. The largest ethnic group is Han Chinese, with over 92 percent of the population, and its members speak the national unifying language, Mandarin. The country is evenly split between rural and urban living, but urbanization continues to grow. Literacy is high in China (96 percent), and education is highly valued throughout the population, especially in the urban environment. The Communist government censors the internet and controls television and radio programming. People are relatively healthy compared to global standards because of China's state-sponsored programs that concentrate on illness prevention. It is hard to imagine a country more culturally complex than China until one studies India.

India, the largest democracy in the world, is the second major power in the Asia-Pacific region. It has a vast territory—about a third the size of the U.S.—and an ethnically diverse population of 1.3 billion. Currently a close second in the total population behind China, India is forecasted to claim the top spot by 2030 with over 1.5 billion people. India's geography is also diverse. The Himalayas sit on its northern border; the terrain drops to a plateau in the central region. A desert makes up much of the western portion of the country, while hills populate the southern landscape.²¹ The climate is moderate, rarely dropping below 40 degrees in the winter or above 100 degrees in the summer. The ethnic and cultural diversity in India is the greatest in the world with hundreds of different nationalities or tribes that speak several hundred languages; 33 of those languages have more than 100 thousand speakers. There are 22 officially recognized languages of India. Although “Indian law defines English as a ‘subsidiary official language,’ it is used in government, business, education, and national

¹⁹ “East & Southeast Asia: China” (Central Intelligence Agency: The World Factbook, 2014), <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>.

²⁰ “People's Republic of China” (CultureGrams World Edition: Brigham Young University, 2015), www.culturegram.com.

²¹ “South Asia: India” (Central Intelligence Agency: The World Factbook, 2014), <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>, 2.

communication.”²² However, the most widely spoken language in India is Hindi, which encompasses approximately 41 percent of the total population. Beyond the ethnic and linguistic divide, India is divided into four distinct social classes. The four classes, assigned by the government, are “based on social, historical, and economic criteria.”²³ A person’s tribal designation is permanent, based on lineage, and plays an important role in social interactions; individuals within a tribe maintain their “distinct culture and identity, and they rarely intermarry”—this is more prominent in rural areas.²⁴ India is primarily an agricultural nation with the majority of Indians living in rural areas and a quarter of the population living in poverty. Literacy is much higher among males but is approximately 60 percent of the total population.²⁵ Television, radio, and newspaper are widely used as the main sources of media while internet usage is low. India’s poverty, which affects approximately 350 million people—in addition to natural disasters, malnutrition and poor sanitation—has led to systemic health challenges for much of the country’s population, many of whom rely on understaffed and ill-equipped government-run hospitals.²⁶

Decoding Oceania

The second region within the Asia-Pacific is Oceania; it is what most label as the Pacific. Oceania consists of Australia (the world’s smallest continent), which covers nearly three million square miles and houses just over 23 million people, and the Pacific Islands, which consist of over 25 thousand islands and 20 independent nations.²⁷ The Pacific Islands combine for over 310 thousand square miles of land mass in the midst of over 63 million square miles of ocean.²⁸ Beyond Oceania’s geographic attributes, its cultural complexity is equally vast. Many of the region’s 40 million people depend on agriculture and fishing to survive.²⁹ The industrialized exceptions include Australia, New Zealand, and Hawaii, which have much larger urban populations. The linguistic diversity is immense: “Pacific Islanders speak more than 1,200 languages, although English and

²² “Republic of India” (CultureGrams World Edition: Brigham Young University, n.d.), www.culturegram.com, 3.

²³ “Republic of India,” 2.

²⁴ “Republic of India,” 2.

²⁵ “South Asia: India,” 5.

²⁶ “Republic of India,” 10.

²⁷ Phillip McArthur, “Oceania - CultureGram” (Brigham Young University: International Culture Studies, 2015), www.culturegram.com.

²⁸ “Pacific Ocean Details,” Education, *WorldAtlas*, (2015), <http://www.worldatlas.com/aatlas/infopage/oceans/pacificocean.htm>.

²⁹ Population Reference Bureau, “2014 World Population Data Sheet.”

French are the official languages of many nations, a legacy of their colonial past.” Additionally, colonization and early missionary work had a great impact on the region’s predominant religion; although indigenous religions remain important, the majority of Pacific Islanders are Christian.³⁰

Oceania, like Asia, covers a vast amount of territory; it contains an enormous amount of national and ethnic diversity, and it embraces many different languages, religions, and cultures. Collectively, the territory and cultural diversity become insurmountable, especially in an environment with finite resources. To embrace the culture—“the way humans view life...a tool used to adapt to our social and physical environments...the sum of all the beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning for a society”—of the Asia-Pacific is a daunting task.³¹ Therefore, labels matter, especially when defining a region of military activity or employment of forces. A region can be broad, encompassing an area such as the Asia-Pacific or narrow and specific such as the Afghanistan-Pakistan model used today. The former consists of nearly 40 countries spread over 80 million square miles with over 4 billion people that speak a collective 3,000 different languages. The latter, a two-country model, detailed in Chapter Three, covers only a half a million square miles and a combined population of 230 million people who speak 40 different languages.

In either case, the task of truly embracing the culture is monumental; however, it is equally important to scope properly and research the region or country and decode the cultural nuances it contains. However, in the resource-constrained environment in which we live, it is impractical to think the DoD is equipped with the manpower to embrace the Asia-Pacific region in its entirety. Therefore, as with any strategy in a resource-constrained environment, prioritization of resource employment must play an integral role and must seek to optimize strategic affect in the region. Countries within the region should be prioritized by strategic importance to allow for a Phase Zero employment of

³⁰ McArthur, “Oceania - CultureGram.”

³¹ Air Force Culture & Language Center, “Expeditionary Culture Field Guide: Afghanistan.”

Hands to become competent in the “beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning for a society” of the identified nations.³²

By realistically scoping, or defining, a region into a viable geographic section, and then prioritizing the countries within that region it enables the Chairman and his staff to take a focused, strategic, and proactive approach to the employment of Hands program. Furthermore, by strategically scoping and prioritizing a geographic area, a culturally attuned and trained leader is better enabled to develop relationships and build partnerships between nations—that is the essence of the Hands program. It seeks to influence and shape the strategic environment through cultural understanding and interoperability with the host nation.³³ The first step towards success is to identify, properly scope, and prioritize the countries within the region for employment. Only then can the DoD build a culturally competent and regionally attuned team able to develop enduring and strategic regional partnerships. This approach is increasingly important as the U.S. continues to contribute to global security and seeks to rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific region. According to an official DoD statement, “Our relationships with Asian allies and key partners are critical to the future stability and growth of the region.”³⁴ The Asia-Pacific Hands program, discussed in the following chapter, is a program designed to familiarize leaders with the complexities of the region and build regionally attuned leaders that are equipped to navigate those complexities.

³² Air Force Culture & Language Center, “Expeditionary Culture Field Guide: Afghanistan.”

³³ Cross-Cultural Competence (3C) is the ability to quickly/accurately comprehend, and then appropriately/effectively engage individuals from distinct cultural backgrounds to achieve the desired effect.

³⁴ Department of Defense (DoD), “Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense,” 2.

Chapter 6

The U.S. is committed to developing a constructive relationship with China that delivers benefits for our two peoples and promotes security and prosperity in Asia and around the world.

~ 2015 U.S. National Security Strategy

The Life Cycle of the Hand ... 85 years

The Old China Hands program accurately assessed and forecasted the outcome of the struggle for power within China. In this regard it was an effective program that built relationships which enabled strategic insight into the dynamic social structure and struggle within the country. Unfortunately, the Cold War and bureaucratic desire to contain Communism skewed the strategic vision of the U.S. The Old China Hands correctly informed U.S. leadership that Mao's Communist party would be the eventual rulers of China; they advised that Mao's party was much stronger and more legitimate than the corrupt Nationalist party. However, the strategic narrative of the U.S. was inflexible; it did not match the reality on the ground, and it ultimately stifled and discredited the Old China Hands program. In retrospect, the strategic error became apparent in 1957 when the U.S. Supreme Court revisited the controversy and subsequently voted unanimously to clear the charges of "sympathetic association with the Communist Party." The Court realized that the Hands' "analyses of the Chinese political outlook were masterpieces: they were informed, penetrating, lucid and objective."¹ The Old China Hands program embodied the essence and the strategic importance of what a Hands-like program can do. However, the bureaucracy that empowered the Hands to build relationships through language, regional expertise, and cultural competence failed to open its strategic aperture to incorporate their inputs.

The verdict is still to be determined on the Afghanistan-Hands program. Unlike the Old China Hands, who took a proactive approach in a Phase Zero environment, the AfPak program was reactive and forced to start in the midst of conflict. The reactive approach induced many hurdles to the proper recruitment and employment of service members. The mandated rapid response from the Service components to fill billets led to many non-volunteers; additionally the lack of Coalition education and buy-in led to ill-

¹ John Service, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, Oral, 1977, 442, 445, and 441.

defined and ill-suited deployment billets that could not leverage the specialized training of the Hands. On the other hand, both programs chose to employ Hands to select countries of strategic interest, the initial program—China—and the Contemporary program—Afghanistan and Pakistan. The most significant difference between the two programs was the expected level of LREC proficiency that a Hand should possess. The two programs, nearly 85 years apart, hold instructive lessons that can, and should, apply to the next generation of a Hands-like program such as Asia-Pacific Hands.

The Return to the Far-East ... Asia-Pacific Hands

Development of the Asia-Pacific Hands Program supports the development, synchronization, implementation, and assessment of policy, strategic guidance, and support of our efforts in the Pacific.

~ General Martin Dempsey, CJCS

The third generation of Hands is already in the works. It is a product of the AfPak Hands program in conjunction with the DoD's strategic focus pivoting from Europe and the Middle East to the Asia-Pacific. In December 2013, the CJCS published the *Asia-Pacific Hands Program* memorandum, which called for the development of a "Hands-like program focused on the Asia-Pacific (APAC) region."² The Chairman "directed the Services and Combatant Commanders 'to see where and how we currently identify and educate our command-path officers, and how we expose them to regional issues.'"³ He further stated, "Future commanders of our force will need deep regional understanding to execute their missions, starting in the Phase Zero shaping environment. I remain convinced that we must arm our operators at all levels with deep personal and professional regional expertise." The Chairman intends to take a proactive approach to the strategic development of cultural and regional awareness by capitalizing on lessons from the past ten years of conflict and the evolving Hands program. He ends by asking the Service Chiefs to look at how to implement and explore this new concept.

The Chairman built his vision not only on the experience over the last ten years of conflict but also on his own career. The only regional training he received was as a

² Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) CM-0301-13, "CM-0301-13."

³ Steven Heffington, "AFPAK to APAC Hands: Lessons Learned," Foreign Policy & National Security, *War On The Rocks*, (January 2014), <http://warontherocks.com/2014/01/afpak-to-apac-hands-lessons-learned/>, 1.

Colonel, when he was involved in the Middle East portfolio while assigned to U.S. Central Command. He stated, “While we have commanding officers who possess regional experience today, it is often achieved by chance.”⁴ His experience, coupled with the last decade of war, has led the Chairman to envision his Regional Hands concept as a career-long professional development program. The idea is first to identify young officers who possess command potential, then educate and expose them to regional issues throughout their career. They would eventually grow to be senior officers and be a part of a “deep bench of general and flag officers who are all regional experts.”⁵ In his memo, he acknowledged the value of highly trained advisors, but he seeks to build a program outside of the traditional FAO, linguist, or other regional subject matter experts; relegating the officers of those legacy programs to advisors and not future commanders. The Chairman’s vision for the Asia-Pacific Hands program must be fine-tuned using lessons from the past as a guide. The remainder of this chapter will attempt to do just that; it will highlight and expand upon six instructive lessons taken from the first and second generations of Hands programs.

Instructive Lessons towards a Future Hands’ Program

Preventing a war in the Asia-Pacific is paramount to being prepared to win a war in the region.

As James Moltz researched the history of U.S. space exploration in an effort to find lessons for future policy, he wrote, “The lessons of history are subtle and contradictory, offering no easy explanations or determinate outcomes.”⁶ However, while considering the programs of the past, it is possible to pull instructive lessons learned and apply them to the future. Steven Heffington, one of the original AfPak Hands, published an article in response to the Chairman’s Asia-Pacific Hands memo during the final stages of his second AfPak deployment as an advisor to the Government of Afghanistan. The article highlighted the initial struggles of the AfPak Hands program but claimed, “Two and a half years later, the program has only continued to gain momentum. It is known and understood theater wide. More importantly, we are known and respected by the

⁴ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) CM-0301-13, “CM-0301-13.”

⁵ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) CM-0301-13, “CM-0301-13.”

⁶ James Clay Moltz, *The Politics of Space Security: Strategic Restraint and the Pursuit of National Interests* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford Security Studies, 2008), 302.

Afghans with whom we work.” He further wrote, “While, the AfPak Hands Program has been successful...the lessons taken from AfPak’s failures may prove just as valuable as those from its success.” Heffington categorized his most relevant lessons into: “utilization, selection, and training and equipping.”⁷ His lessons are relevant to this study and consistent with its findings, and they form the basis for the following instructive lessons.

Lesson #1:

The Chairman needs to scope properly and define the area for employment based on the cultural diversity of the designated region(s).

The most relevant lesson gleaned from the study of previous Hands programs is the scope, culturally and geographically, of the defined region for employment. The two regional predecessors to the APAC Hands concept were both concentrated at the country level. As detailed in Chapters Three and Five, the countries themselves, China, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, are extremely diverse and culturally complex. China has over 56 officially recognized ethnic groups that speak their unique language and have their own social and societal norms. In Afghanistan and Pakistan, the ethnic diversity is also extremely complex; there are over 40 major tribes, each with its own unique dialect and social customs. In addition to these salient points, the geographic enormity of the countries over which the diversity spans is another complex hurdle to overcome when attempting to build relationships based on personal encounters. The larger the focus area, the more diverse and difficult it becomes to pare down languages, customs, and social norms. That diversity makes it extremely difficult to interact effectively at a personal level to build and foster partnerships in the region. The Asia-Pacific region as detailed in Chapter Five and summarized by Steven Basham and Nelson Rouleau in their article, *A Rebalance Strategy for Pacific Air Forces*. The following is an excerpt from Basham and Rauleau’s article and is a prime example of *biting off more than you can chew* in terms of properly scoping and defining a region for Hand employment.

Without considering anything else, note that the Asia-Pacific region’s vast size and complexity require continued focus and attention. In addition to

⁷ Heffington, “AFPAK to APAC Hands: Lessons Learned,” 2.

China, the world's most populous country; India, the most populous democracy; and Indonesia, a secular democracy, the Asia-Pacific contains over half the world's population. More than 1,000 languages are spoken in 36 nations spread across 52 percent of the earth's surface. Two of the three largest economies are located in the Asia-Pacific along with 10 of the 14 smallest. More than one-third of Asia-Pacific nations are smaller island nations, including the smallest republic in the world and the most diminutive nation in Asia. The region spans 16 time zones and an international date line. In addition, natural disasters are persistent, random, and an unavoidable threat. These facts, combined with emerging issues—particularly the shifting security environment—present the Asia-Pacific as a unique challenge for the United States.⁸

Scoping a region also sends a strong message to those within the region deemed important enough for collaboration. The old saying goes—if everyone is important, nobody is important; it seems appropriate in this case. In the resource-constrained environment in which we operate, the U.S. is unlikely to allocate enough time, money, and manpower to allow individuals to become LREC experts in a region as diverse as the Asia-Pacific. The U.S. must continue to identify the strategically significant countries that are in-line with the U.S. National Security Strategy for further education, employment, and partnership. Once identified, the U.S. must prioritize the countries in the order of strategic importance to the U.S. and its Allies in the region.

Prioritization must take a whole-of-government approach. Detailed coordination between U.S. political and military leaders must articulate a long-term—prioritized—strategy in the Asia-Pacific; one example of this coordination will be the Geographic Combatant Command (USPACOM) working closely with the State Department's Country Teams throughout a long-term—possibly indefinite—operation. The product is the focused employment of Hands to an area of strategic importance that can “lead to greater influence at higher levels when difficult diplomatic incidents occur.”⁹ This approach will also allow for balancing the time, money, and manpower conundrum to make the best use of available assets or identify a need for additional resources. The determination of priority is difficult, but it is also crucial to strategy formulation in a resource-constrained environment—the reality in which we operate. The *Army War*

⁸ Basham and Rouleau, “A Rebalance Strategy for Pacific Air Forces: Flight Plan to Runways and Relationships,” 7.

⁹ Groh and Bailey, Jr., “Fighting More Fires with Less Water,” 104.

College Guide to National Security Issues emphasized that resources are likely to be limited and may lead to conflict during strategy formulation and employment. It contends that establishing priority is of the utmost importance because, “from the perspective of the policy maker, interests may very well come into conflict with each other.”¹⁰ Thus, prioritization becomes a method to reduce conflict once the strategy is in play and provides focus to the operation, program, or policy. In summary, scoping the employment area is critical; equally important is prioritizing the countries within the area. Together, scoping and prioritizing are fundamental to the success of the APAC Hands program.

Lesson #2:

A Hands-like program must take a proactive approach by investing in regional learning and employment. The optimal time to deploy is during Phase Zero operations; that time in the Asia-Pacific is now.

A second major lesson that follows the scoping of a region is the need for a proactive approach to program implementation. Here, as demonstrated in previous chapters, the historical evidence reveals a distinct difference between the two previous Hands programs. The Old China Hands program originated shortly after the Rogers Act of 1924 in conjunction with the transformation of the Foreign Service component of the Department of State. Its goal was to instill the qualities of a professional organization through focused and competitive recruitment and promotion processes. The most capable individuals were selected, trained, and immersed in Chinese culture for up to 10 years. Nearly 85 years later the reactive inception of the AfPak Hands program was in conjunction with the reformation of a fledgling strategy in Afghanistan. It involved very little recruitment in the form of motivated, promotable, and high-apptitude volunteers.

Nearly 80 percent of service members selected for the initial AfPak cohort were non-volunteers; some of those selected were sent to training with as little as ten days’ notice.¹¹ Most did not have any previous experience in LREC; in fact, six of the eight interviewees reported they had no prior LREC exposure. One of the two that had prior

¹⁰ J. Boone Bartholomees, Army War College (U.S.), and Army War College (U.S.), eds., *U.S. Army War College Guide to National Security Issues*, 5th ed (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2012), 18.

¹¹ Interview with Major from AfPak Hands program, 7 Feb 2015. (Unattributed Interview #7), Follow-up conducted on 11 February 2015. Interviewee has had multiple deployments and has been associated with the program from 2009-2015.

language experience had no formal training in LREC but had relevant deployment experience prior to becoming an AfPak Hand. The other had an elementary proficiency in Italian before joining the Hands program.¹² In short, the program was hastily implemented and the Hands were quickly pushed through six months of training before their first deployment.

Instead developing AfPak LREC experts, the program's training goal was to instill an elementary level competence—clearly not synchronized with the Chairman's vision of LREC "experts." The timetable the Hands program was working with did not always allow trainees to achieve the goal of an elementary level language competence and it did not stop the Hand from deploying.¹³ The training pipeline was a balance between getting Hands into theater quickly and providing them an adequate amount of language competency to get started. Many of the Hands interviewed thought the language training was the key to their effectiveness, but it was too short. The minimalistic goal and condensed training program were simply inadequate for the "expertise" envisioned by the Chairman. A current Hand commented: it "isn't enough time to be proficient enough to carry running conversations...[the] intent is to have 'survival language skills'.... The true brilliance of learning some language is that it opens doors, puts a smile on an Afghan's face, and allows for bonding that wouldn't otherwise occur."¹⁴ Steven Heffington highlighted "selection" as one of his three major lessons from the AfPak Hands experience. He stated, "The program has learned painfully that not everyone can be a Hand...[the candidate] must be able to learn a language, adapt...internalize a new culture, be independent, confident, and capable of operating with little guidance, alone or in small groups, and away from the main military effort." He goes on to say Hands must want to engulf themselves in "historical, cultural, military, economic, and social information...[they] must be eloquent and politically savvy." Heffington concluded, "To be successful, APAC Hands must focus on recruiting and developing the right people with the right capabilities."¹⁵

¹² Interviews with eight Service members from the AfPak Hands program, Jan - Feb 2015. (Unattributed Interviews).

¹³ CAPT Russell McLachlan, USN (Former AfPak Hands Program Manager, U.S. Forces Afghanistan), Interviewed by the author, 4 Feb 15.

¹⁴ Interview with Major from AfPak Hands program, 7 Feb 2015. (Unattributed Interview #7), Follow-up conducted on 11 February 2015. Interviewee has had multiple deployments and has been associated with the program from 2009-2015.

¹⁵ Heffington, "AFPAK to APAC Hands: Lessons Learned," 4.

In an interview with Navy Captain Russell McLachlan, the AfPak Hands program manager in Afghanistan during the initial employment of Hands, he commented, “AfPak came late to the ball game. To influence, shape, understand and articulate from within the culture of a country you must get in really early, prior to conflict. APAC’s time is now, maybe even yesterday; we need time to *invest* in their culture.”¹⁶ The Chairman’s December 2013 memorandum initiating the Regional Hands concept is a step in the right direction. The Joint Staff must continue to ensure the next generation’s program (APAC Hands) accounts for the lessons of the past and establishes it in a Phase Zero environment. It must also ensure the recruitment of Hands is selective in nature based upon proven performance, aptitude, and the motivation that typically accompanies a volunteer. Once a cohort of Hands is recruited, those Hands must be given the time to build a strong foundation in LREC for the region or country to which they are assigned.

Lesson #3:

The Chairman should educate the Service Chiefs and Coalition partners on the cultural focus of the program well in advance. He must achieve understanding and buy-in to ensure proper and efficient employment.

As is typical of large organizations, the Service components may be uncomfortable with change. Stephen Rosen’s argument can be helpful in this situation; he highlighted the fact that each Service has its own unique organizational culture, “a distinct way of thinking about the way war should be conducted, not only by its own branch, but by the other branches and services with which it would have to interact in combat.”¹⁷ Therefore the hesitation to innovate or embrace change is more of an ideological struggle than anything else. Rosen explained that the “ideological struggle will revolve around a new theory of victory, an explanation of what the next war will look like and how officers must fight if it is to be won.”¹⁸ For the Chairman and his staff to regain momentum and further the development of the APAC program they must, as Rosen put it, “formulate a strategy for innovation.”¹⁹ It is impractical to think that pushing a cultural innovation from the top echelon of the military will be successful

¹⁶ CAPT Russell McLachlan, USN (Former AfPak Hands Program Manager, U.S. Forces Afghanistan), Interviewed by the author, 4 Feb 15.

¹⁷ Rosen, *Winning the next War Innovation and the Modern Military*, 19.

¹⁸ Rosen, *Winning the next War Innovation and the Modern Military*, 20.

¹⁹ Rosen, *Winning the next War Innovation and the Modern Military*, 21.

without first developing a strategy to integrate it into each of the individual Services. This strategy must take a proactive approach; the Chairman must educate and enlist the support of the Service Chiefs to ensure understanding, acceptance, and integration into each Service's unique organizational culture.

The education of Service components and Coalition partners to ensure program buy-in is a third important lesson taken from the experience of the AfPak Hands program. It is not completely separable from the second major lesson, since a proactive approach in this regard provides the time needed for the Chairman to educate the Service Chiefs on the intricacies of the program. During the initial development of AfPak Hands, many Services could not adequately promote the program and therefore were unable to recruit the numbers of volunteers needed. They were also reluctant to provide high-speed, high-aptitude, and motivated potential commanders because of the unknown career implications of separating them from their primary duty for up to five years—a quarter of their potential career. This outcome stands in stark contrast to two separate memorandums issued by Chairman Mullen; the first announced the program as “the number-one manpower [and] personnel issue” and requested the Services to fill billets with their top-tier talent.²⁰ Admiral Mullen published the second memo just over three months later, and it reiterated his expectation to fill the program with the DoD's best and brightest. It took some time for the Services to buy into the program; some AfPak Hands felt like the Services still, after nearly six years, have not fully accepted the program as a top-tier professional development opportunity. It is widely believed that Hands “taken out of [their] career field have become non-competitive for promotion” and command within their respective Service.²¹ Although the career implications of the program are outside the LREC scope of this study, they certainly deserve further research and attention; chapter Seven will discuss this fact in more detail in an effort to prompt the discussion now and promote additional research once enough promotion data can be acquired.

²⁰ McLachlan, DoD Bloggers Roundtable with CAPT Russell McLachlan (USN), Program Manager, U.S. Forces Afghanistan: Afghan Hands Program, 1

²¹ Interview with a Lieutenant Colonel from the AfPak Hands program, 2 Feb 2015. (Unattributed Interview #1). Follow-up conducted on 5 Feb 2015.

In addition to the education and buy-in of the Service Components, the Coalition and Host Nation also need to have the time to comprehend the nuances of the program. This relates to what Steven Heffington articulates as his most relevant lesson learned—utilization. Through his first-hand experience, he found that “In-theater commanders are often desperate to fill normal staff vacancies, and out of theater there remains a generally inflexible service assignment process.”²² Many of the down-range organizations failed to grasp what this program entailed and were not familiar with the unique competencies of the AfPak personnel or the overarching employment vision of the Chairman.

The AfPak Hands program did not have an effective mechanism to vet and validate the Request For Forces (RFF), which led to ill-constructed deployment billets. Even further, Coalition staffs were unable to match the previous experience, expertise, or competencies of the individual Hands consistently to the deployed positions. Some AfPak Hands, for example, had training in one language (Pashto) but were deployed to a region that spoke another (Dari); or, their first deployment was to a Dari speaking region and the second was to a region where Afghans predominantly spoke Pashto.²³ In sum, much of this turmoil was a product of the reactive nature of the program’s implementation, which happened in the midst of ongoing conflict and stabilization operations.

In the dynamic nature of combat operations, manning positions come and go. They transform, and there is always a shortage of personnel. A proactive approach with proper education and buy-in from the Services, Coalition, and Host Nation’s leadership is essential. Additionally, there must be a codified vetting and verification process managed at the Joint Staff level that oversees the building of deployed billets based on the legitimate need for LREC trained experts. Heffington concluded there “should be a mechanism that oversees and manages this process and has the authority to make changes or at the very least highlight problems to appropriate leadership for action.”²⁴ A focused effort to achieve buy-in, education, and employment oversight will set a solid foundation for the APAC Hands program to begin construction.

²² Heffington, “AFPAK to APAC Hands: Lessons Learned,” 3.

²³ Interview with a Major from the AfPak Hands program, 1 Feb 2015. (Unattributed Interview #3). Follow-up conducted on 6 Feb 2015.

²⁴ Heffington, “AFPAK to APAC Hands: Lessons Learned,” 3.

Lesson #4:

The Chairman must build a program that efficiently manages, monitors, and preserves our most precious resource...human capital.

“People are our greatest asset.”²⁵ The fourth instructive lesson pertains to the management of human capital for a future Hands program. As with any finite resource, human capital is extremely valuable and must be managed efficiently. The AfPak Hands program pulls officers out of their primary career or specialty, immerses them in LREC for four-to-five years, and then returns them to their respective career path. Five years equates to a quarter of an officer’s career if he or she serves until the 20-year retirement milestone. Currently, the DoD’s return on investment—LREC training and employment—is minimal and may not be leveraged again within the span of a career. This realization has led the Chairman to envision an APAC Hands program that will identify young officers and make them regional experts in addition to their normal career path by placing them in a specified region for the majority of their career.

This vision takes no account of the time needed to become professionally competent in two areas of expertise within in a single career. It offers the Services no roadmap for how to fit 10 pounds of experience in a 5-pound jar (career). The APAC vision fails to capitalize on the DoD’s primary program that builds LREC professionals—the FAO. The DoD’s Joint FAO program is the perfect foundational organization to build upon for a regional Hands program. As highlighted in Chapter Four, FAOs are board-selected, highly capable individuals with command potential and an aptitude to learn LREC—everything the Chairman desires in a Hand. Currently the program already has a pool of trained FAOs assigned to specified regions around world.

In addition to the Joint FAO program, each Service has its respective LREC program. The Air Force, for example, developed the Language Enabled Airman Program (LEAP) to “sustain, enhance and utilize the existing language skills and talents of Airmen. The goal of LEAP is to develop a core group of General-Purpose Force (GPF) Airmen, across specialties and careers, possessing the capability to communicate in one

²⁵ Department of Defense (DoD), “National Security Space Strategy (NSSS)” (Department of Defense (DoD), 2011), http://www.defense.gov/home/features/2011/0111_nsss/docs/NationalSecuritySpaceStrategyUnclassifiedSummary_Jan2011.pdf, 8.

or more foreign languages.”²⁶ The Navy provides a second example with its Personnel Exchange Program (PEP) which enhances “international and inter-service relationships by providing exchange opportunities for U.S. Navy officers and enlisted personnel.”²⁷ PEP currently collaborates with 20 foreign nations for the exchange of over 200 service members. “Participants receive foreign language training, if required, and normally serve two-year tours as a fully-integrated member of the host nation’s military.”²⁸ A cursory overview of PEP and LEAP display just a few of the Service-specific LREC programs outside the realm of the FAO and Hand.

The Chairman’s future Hands program must synergize the various LREC programs with the DoD. A Joint Hands program managed by his staff should combine and capitalize on existing language and regional expertise programs and, in turn, increase program efficiency through the rationalization of overlapping programs. Placing the program under the centralized management of the Joint Staff would provide a foundational pool of candidates from which to build a new generation of regional experts. These same professionals, taken from existing LREC programs, could and should make up the bulk of the new generation of regional Hands. They are competitively selected and identified as motivated, competent, and command-potential officers. As they are exposed to regional issues throughout their careers, they will build upon an existing LREC foundation to meet the Chairman’s vision of having “a deep bench of general and flag officers who are all regional experts.”²⁹ To build this program effectively, the Chairman and his staff must consolidate and synergize the existing Joint and Service specific programs. They should take an efficiency-based approach to the management of our most precious resource—human capital.

²⁶ “LEAP Program Information,” Government, *Air Force Culture and Language Center (AFCLC)*, (2015), <http://culture.af.mil/leap/index.aspx#>.

²⁷ “Personnel Exchange Program (PEP),” Government, *Navy Personnel Command*, (2015), http://www.public.navy.mil/BUPERS-NPC/CAREER/LANGUAGE_CULTURE/Pages/PEP.aspx.

²⁸ “Personnel Exchange Program (PEP).”

²⁹ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) CM-0301-13, “CM-0301-13.”

Lesson #5:

Strength lies in numbers. If the Chairman wants the most capable LREC program moving forward, he should not artificially limit potential candidates.

The fifth relevant lesson falls in line with the resource and manpower shortage mentioned previously. The Chairman's vision is focused on the professional military officer and using the Hands program to build regionally attuned commanders; however, the Chairman fails to account for the vast majority of service members—the enlisted force. Many of these professionals are highly capable service members and may possess the aptitude and motivation to become LREC assets. As shown below, in 2013 over 83 percent—1.8 million—of our force was enlisted; a 2015 forecast shows much the same, although slightly decreasing to just over 82 percent—1.7 million.³⁰

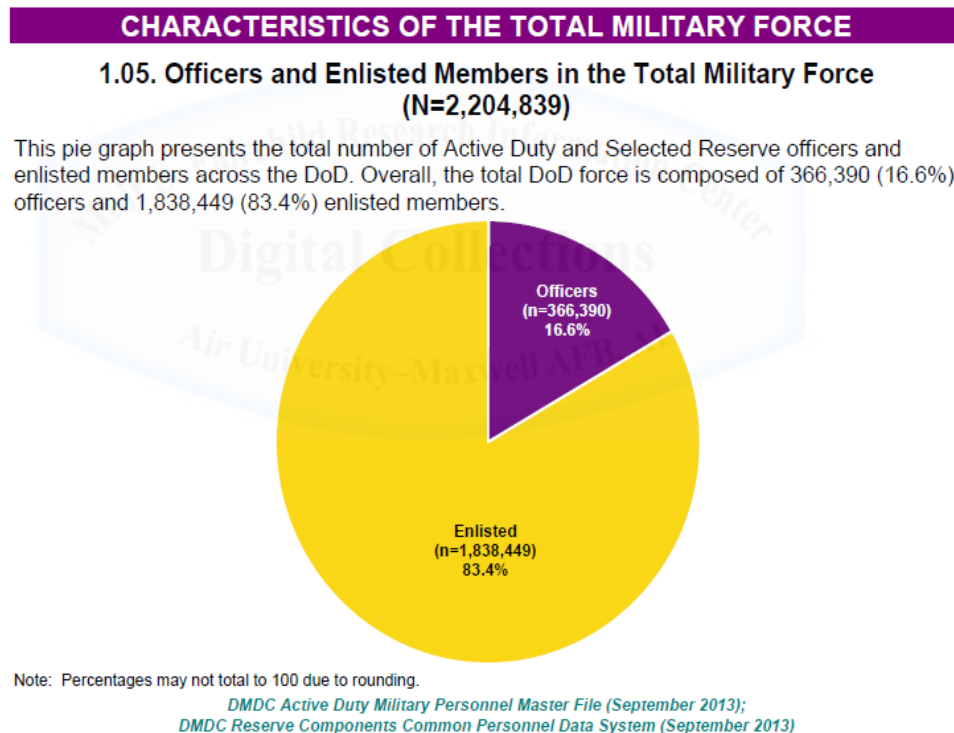


Figure 5: Breakdown of the Total Military Manpower (Officer vs. Enlisted)

Source: DoD, 2013 Demographics: Profile of the Military Community, Demographics (Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, 2013)

Language, Regional Expertise, and Cross-Cultural Competence is blind to rank. Instead of severely limiting the manpower pool by focusing on officers alone, the program must

³⁰ Department of Defense (DoD), *Defense Manpower Requirements Report: Fiscal Year 2015* (Assistant Secretary of Defense for Readiness & Force Management: Department of Defense, June 2014), 3.

focus on the capabilities of individuals to learn a foreign language, become an expert in a specified region, and embrace the challenge willingly and wholeheartedly.

The Old China Hands, for example, only recruited the best and brightest; those who proved themselves the most competent among their peers through various phases of aptitude testing went to China. AfPak Hands, on the other hand, did not have stringent admission requirements or testing. In fact, initially most Hands were non-volunteers, which led to a wide range of individual effectiveness. The least effective Hands were those non-volunteers who refused to embrace the mission. The most effective Hands were those who possessed the qualities of “operational competence, language aptitude, an open mind, an outgoing personality, flexibility, empathy, a willingness to take risks, and an entrepreneurial mindset.”³¹ Those qualities of success are critical to a program whose sole mission is to embrace a culture and its people through the building and fostering of relationships. The DoD best ensures success by selecting the most qualified and motivated candidates for a Hands-like program. Therefore, we should not artificially limit eligibility to only 16 percent of potential candidates. The program should do the exact opposite; that is, attempt to reach 100 percent of all service members through extensive advertisement. Then we must recruit a pool of willing volunteers and competitively select them based on functional specialties and the known attributes for success mentioned above.

Lesson #6:

The Joint Staff must synergize and synchronize the Combat Skills Training (CST) and the equipment issue of Hands.

Similar to Lesson #4 (Human Capital Management), the lack of a standardized training pipeline with centralized oversight by the Joint Staff has created additional inefficiencies. Steven Heffington’s third and final lesson focuses on the non-LREC Combat Skills Training (CST) pipeline that occurs prior to the Phase One LREC training detailed in Chapter Four. He highlighted the disadvantages of allowing the Service components to individualize their training pipelines versus a centrally managed and standardized Joint Hand training concept. He claimed: “The result is, AfPak Hands have

³¹ Cohee and Wilkinson, *Research and Analysis Project for Afghanistan-Pakistan Hands - Cohort I*, 131.

deployed with different equipment and different levels of pre-deployment training based on their parent Service.”³² The CST encompasses familiarization training on weapons, vehicle defensive driving, improvised explosive device (IED) awareness, convoy operations, ground navigation, and first aid. However, as previously mentioned, the parent Service drives the CST pre-deployment training pipeline as shown in the table below:³³

<u>Service</u>	<u>Training</u>	<u>Timeframe</u> (duration)	<u>Location(s)</u> ²
Army	• Combat Readiness Training (CRC)	After completion of APH Phase 1 Training (one week)	Fort Benning, GA
Air Force ¹	• Combat Airmen Skills Training (CAST)	Prior to Phase 1 Training (CAST: two weeks)	<u>CAST</u> : Camp Bullis, TX; Fort Dix, NJ; Camp Guernsey, WY
	• Advanced Contingency Skills Training (CST)	(CST: one month)	<u>CST</u> : Fort Bliss, TX; Fort Dix, NJ; Fort Polk, LA
	• Air Advisory Course (AAC)	(AAC: one month)	<u>AAC</u> : Fort Dix, NJ
Marines	• Pre-Deployment Training	Prior to Phase 1 Training (two weeks)	Camp Lejeune, NC
Navy	• Expeditionary Navy IA Combat Training	Prior to Phase 1 Training (two weeks)	Fort Jackson, SC
Civilian	• Civilian Expeditionary Force Training	Prior to Phase 1 Training (one week)	Camp Atterbury, IN
¹ U.S. Air Forces Central Command (AFCENT) decides which course an Air Force AFPAK Hand will take based on APH billet			
² The various training locations used by the Air Force are intended to allow for flexibility in class availability and travel distance			

Figure 6: AfPAK Hands Pre-Deployment Combat Skills Training (CST)

Source: JS/J5 Pakistan-Afghanistan Coordination Cell: NDU Study, March 2012

As highlighted by Heffington, the result of this decentralized, Service component managed, training pipeline is an unsynchronized approach to a Joint Hands training program. He recommended for future programs that “the architects...should invest substantial time and effort into working with each Service to develop a training pipeline that meets the common needs of the [Hands] program.”³⁴ Current and former Hands, felt CST was beneficial in preparing them for their upcoming deployment; however, there were also many complaints regarding the flow of the training itself. Some individuals experienced a 3-week break in training between courses. Others attended CST during the Christmas and New Year holidays and were not allowed to leave the base to visit family despite experiencing a training break.³⁵ Regarding CST, one Hand stated it was

³² Heffington, “AFPAK to APAC Hands: Lessons Learned,” 4.

³³ Cohee and Wilkinson, *Research and Analysis Project for Afghanistan-Pakistan Hands - Cohort 1*, 25.

³⁴ Heffington, “AFPAK to APAC Hands: Lessons Learned,” 4.

³⁵ Interviews with two Majors from the AfPAK Hands program, Feb 2015. (Unattributed Interviews #7 & #3).

inefficient; “we spent as much time waiting to enter training platforms as we did on the actual platform.”³⁶ Another thought the “training was completely useless” because it failed to account for previous deployment training. He felt there should have been an effort to avoid redundancy and tailor as necessary.³⁷ Because this is anecdotal, no definitive general conclusions can be made. However, these perspectives highlight an area ripe for additional research. As Heffington concluded, “The APAC Hands Program should learn from AfPak Hands’ challenges in this area and preload coordination with the services to ensure the first APAC Hands are sent forward with the right training and equipment.”³⁸

“People-to-people relationships [will] maximize the strategic effects of our national power.”³⁹ It is the people you employ who make the difference; by recruiting personnel who are knowledgeable and innovative thinkers with the aptitude and attributes for success, the next generation of Hands can hit the ground running. The shortcomings of the previous programs were mitigated by the Hands themselves. The AfPak Hands overcame the adversity of a program built on the fly through innovative thinking and honest assessment as the program continued to mature. They were “dedicated people [who] were given sufficient training and more than normal leeway, and then pointed in a general direction and told to figure out what needed to be done and make a difference.”⁴⁰ Those Hands made the best of their situation and poured the foundation upon which future programs can build. The next generation of Hands, the military Services, and their managers on the Joint Staff can benefit from the past. They will, should they choose to do so, have the opportunity to capitalize on the lessons highlighted above to place future Hands in a position to excel from inception.

³⁶ Interview with Lieutenant Colonel from AfPak Hands program, 6 Feb 2015. (Unattributed Interview #5). Follow-up conducted on 10 February 2015.

³⁷ Interview with Major from the AfPak Hands program, 1 Feb 2015. (Unattributed Interview #3). Follow-up conducted on 6 Feb 2015.

³⁸ Heffington, “AFPAK to APAC Hands: Lessons Learned,” 4.

³⁹ Department of Defense (DoD), “National Security Strategy (NSS),” 4.

⁴⁰ Heffington, “AFPAK to APAC Hands: Lessons Learned,” 3.

Chapter 7

We have learned very painfully in these wars about how important culture is. We have learned about how little about the culture in these countries we really understood.

~ Admiral Mike Mullen

Conclusion

The quote by Admiral Mullen captures the essence of the foundational lesson contained in this essay; that is, cultural understanding underpins the formulation of strategy. The Asia-Pacific (APAC) Hands concept, as envisioned by Chairman Dempsey, has embraced this important lesson. It also recognizes the importance of integrating language, regional expertise, and cultural competence (LREC) into the art of strategy. However, the program must be refined based on the lessons of the past and present Hands programs.

This essay attempted to answer the question: What instructive lessons from previous Hands programs can assist in the refinement, understanding, and development of the Chairman's Asia-Pacific Hands concept? The previous chapter provided six salient lessons that can and should be applied to the construction and implementation of the APAC Hands program. Those lessons are summarized below and provide tangible steps for strengthening the Chairman's APAC Hands concept. They also provide the impetus to synergize the various LREC programs within the DoD by placing them under the watchful eye of the Chairman's Joint Staff. Doing so will consolidate redundant programs, maximize standardization and resource flexibility, and increase the sharing of best practices. The goal should be to use the lessons of previous programs to build an enduring Joint Force LREC construct for the future.

Implications for Future Programs

1. The Chairman needs to scope properly and define the area for employment based on the cultural diversity of the designated region(s).

2. A Hands-like program must take a proactive approach by investing in regional learning and employment. The optimal time to deploy is during Phase Zero operations; that time in the Asia-Pacific is now.
3. The Chairman should educate the Service Chiefs and Coalition partners on the cultural focus of the program well in advance. He must achieve understanding and buy-in to ensure proper and efficient employment.
4. The Chairman must build a program that efficiently manages, monitors, and preserves our most precious resource...human capital.
5. Strength lies in numbers. If the Chairman wants the most capable LREC program moving forward, he should not artificially limit potential candidates.
6. The Joint Staff must synergize and synchronize the Combat Skills Training (CST) and the equipment issue of Hands.

Admiral Mullen perhaps best expressed the overall lesson learned in a 2014 speech reflecting on his time as Chairman during which he oversaw the war in Afghanistan. He emphasized that we must better respect foreign people and their land by having “a much clearer understanding of their cultures.” Mullen continued, “hopefully we can take that aspect...of understanding other people’s challenges, [and] understanding other people’s cultures to in fact be engaged with them in ways that become preventative of war in the future, as opposed to the requirement to acculturate ourselves in the middle of a fight” like we did in Afghanistan.¹ Admiral Mullen realized the cultural lesson eight years into a conflict that had been going on for 14 years and continues to this day. It is paramount that the current Chairman and his staff capitalize on Admiral Mullen’s hard-learned lessons by codifying the programs and integrating them into our strategic planning for the Asia-Pacific.

¹ Mullen, “Admiral Mike Mullen on Lessons Learned in Afghanistan and Iraq,” 13:26

Limitations and Future Research

Culture is a massive subject, and as detailed in Chapter Two, it is extremely difficult to define. Culture is not stagnant; it evolves with social interaction and experiences. By codifying a particular definition, we naturally restrain, limit, and stunt the researcher's and the reader's ability to grasp the subject of culture in its entirety. The research parameters for this essay were limited in an effort to fine-tune a small portion of the subject—culture within military strategy, or more specifically, the LREC focus of the Hands program. Therefore, this focus area leaves much room for further research on the subject of culture and the Hands program.

Chapter Six mentioned two areas within the Hands program that require further study: (1) future career implications and (2) standardization of combat skills training (CST) and equipment issue. Despite the Chairman's intent that the Hands program be an "accelerator rather than an inhibitor of career progression within each of the Services," there is widespread concern regarding career implications of the program.² Farzana Marie in her book *Hearts For Sale! A Buyer's Guide to Winning in Afghanistan* highlighted the fear in many current and former AfPak Hands: "Many qualified potential recruits fear the impact on their career...based on the experience of many currently serving Afghan Hands who feel it has negatively impacted their opportunities for advancement."³ Now that the AfPak Hands program is nearly six years old, there should be sufficient promotion data to support further research of the career implications for participating in the program. Such research may alleviate the career stigma attached to the program, assist potential volunteerism, or highlight an ongoing problem within the Services that must be rectified for program sustainment. A second area for study entails the standardization of CST and equipment issue across the Joint Force. During the research for this study, many interviewees commented on the lack of standardization in training and equipment. As shown in Chapter Six, the Service components individualize their pre-deployment CST pipeline prior to candidates entering the standardized LREC training curriculum. Equipment issue follows suit and is the responsibility of the parent

² Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) CM-0948-09, "CM-0948-09."

³ Farzana Marie, *Hearts For Sale! A Buyer's Guide to Winning in Afghanistan* (Worldwide Writings, LLC, 2013), 63.

Service which as resulted in “AfPak Hands [deploying] with different equipment and different levels of pre-deployment training.”⁴

A final area for further research that was outside the scope of this project revolves around the employment concept of the Asia-Pacific Hands program. The Chairman’s employment concept for developing his “deep bench of general and flag officers who are all regional experts” entails a radical departure from the traditional assignment process.⁵ It seems to focus on a depth of experience in a dedicated region at the cost of a breath of worldwide operational experience. Using the notional career path construct provided by the Chairman as an attachment to his APAC memorandum, an Air Force pilot, for example, will be identified as a young Company Grade Officer (CGO), a Lieutenant (LT), to participate in the program.⁶ After pilot training, that CGO will receive initial Asia-Pacific LREC training and subsequently will be assigned to a flying unit within the Pacific Air Force (PACAF). As the CGO matures in experience and grade, he or she will attend Intermediate Developmental Education (IDE) then return to the Pacific for a staff position at PACAF until reaching a competitive point for Squadron Command within PACAF. Upon a successful command tour, the now Field Grade Officer (FGO) would attend Senior Developmental Education (SDE) with a follow-on assignment at U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM). In essence, the officer identified as a LT would reach maturity as a General Officer (GO) within the Pacific theater alone. The career path of this officer follows a “deliberate, accumulated mix of operational and staff tours built on a foundation of education and refresh opportunities” within the Pacific theater. The Chairman’s goal is to build a program that can provide a “sustainable cadre of regionally experienced and focused senior commanders.”⁷ This paradigm-shifting professional development concept raises four primary questions:

1. If this is a selective program, how many LTs must be identified and input into the program to make a single GO?

⁴ Heffington, “AFPAK to APAC Hands: Lessons Learned,” 4.

⁵ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) CM-0301-13, “CM-0301-13.”

⁶ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) CM-0301-13, “CM-0301-13,” Attach A.

⁷ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) CM-0301-13, “CM-0301-13,” Attach A.

2. How is command-potential assessed—not to mention GO-capable—officer as a young CGO? How do we account for varying levels of maturity and late bloomers?
3. Does command or GO potential equate to the capacity and ability to learn and embrace LREC?
4. Can this path provide the breadth of experience needed (leadership and acculturation) for a senior-level manager in a worldwide organization to be effective, promotable, and credible?

It is an interesting concept worthy of not only the above questions, but also many more from each of the Service components. Each Service professionally develops their officers based on the unique requirements of individual Service occupational specialty codes (AFSC/MOS). This proposal will dramatically affect the way each Service currently promotes, assigns, and develops depth and breadth within their officer corps. For this innovative approach to succeed the Chairman must work closely with the Service Chiefs to address their concerns and build pathways for success.

Succeeding in Military Innovation

As [the Iraq and Afghanistan] wars wind down, we will need to accelerate efforts to pivot to new global realities. We know that these new realities require us to innovate, to compete, and to lead in new ways. Rather than pull back from the world, we need to press forward and renew our leadership.

~ Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, 2011

The need for military innovation arises out of changes in the security environment; the origin of the Hands program is no different. The building of an effective APAC Hands program is the next link in the chain; it requires innovation—it requires change. Stephen Rosen’s book *Winning The Next War* is instructive in this arena. Rosen highlighted that bureaucracies are highly resistant to change, and “military

bureaucracies, moreover, are especially resistant to change.”⁸ He also provided a framework for military change to succeed; he argued: “Bureaucracies do innovate, however, even military ones, and the question thus becomes not whether but *why* and *how* they can change.”⁹ This essay attempted to glean instructive lessons from past programs to highlight the *why*’s and *how*’s in an effort to support the Chairman and his staff in promoting the discussion and development of the APAC Hands program.

The Chairman’s December 2013 memorandum initiating the APAC Hands concept was a start. However, since then little has progressed within the Services under the management of the Joint Staff. Rosen noted when analyzing military innovation that a “peculiar character of military organizations in peacetime [is] that they are simply unlikely to innovate at all if left to themselves.”¹⁰ Part of the reason for this he claimed is that the “order to innovate is likely to be ambiguous because what is being ordered is not some familiar, well-defined task, but something that has never been done before.”¹¹ The Chairman’s guidance is exactly that, ambiguous and ill-defined; it currently raises more questions than it answers, and has, as Rosen pointed out, met an ideological brick wall. At this point, the Services must pick up the baton and ask the questions relevant to each of their unique organizations. Once the ideological hurdle is overcome, Rosen said the path to success will be paved by senior military officers, “who are well respected by traditional military standards,...[have] the necessary power to champion innovation...[and] create a new set of operational tasks...and a new promotion pathway for young officers to follow.”¹² In this case, the Chairman and the Service Chiefs are the change agents and they must break down the ideological barriers within their Services to create operational tasks and promotion opportunity for future LREC professionals. Once the innovation is established or started, Rosen also pointed out that the path to success is a time-consuming endeavor. He stated: “Because of the time necessary for young officers to be promoted to senior rank, the practical side of the innovation typically took a generation to accomplish.”¹³ To put it bluntly, as the old people and processes that resist

⁸ Rosen, *Winning the next War Innovation and the Modern Military*, 2.

⁹ Rosen, *Winning the next War Innovation and the Modern Military*, 3.

¹⁰ Rosen, *Winning the next War Innovation and the Modern Military*, 9.

¹¹ Rosen, *Winning the next War Innovation and the Modern Military*, 11.

¹² Rosen, *Winning the next War Innovation and the Modern Military*, 58 & 76.

¹³ Rosen, *Winning the next War Innovation and the Modern Military*, 58.

change move on from the military, the innovation will then take over. But that takes time and “the process is only as fast as the rate at which young officers [who have accepted the change as the new way of business] rise to the top.”¹⁴

The Chairman’s vision for APAC Hands professional development undoubtedly embraces Rosen’s argument for effective innovation; however, the Services unfortunately have not. Rosen concluded that:

Rather than money, talented military personnel, time, and information have been the key resources for innovation. The study of peacetime military innovation showed that when military leaders could attract talented young officers with great potential for promotion to a new way of war, and then were able to protect and promote them, they were able to produce new, usable military capabilities. Failure to redirect human resources resulted in the abortion of several promising innovations.¹⁵

This captures the essence of the history of the Hands program. The empirical program of Old China Hands was properly resourced and utilized well-trained volunteers. The contemporary version, AfPak Hands, was poorly resourced and employed minimally trained non-volunteers. If the Chairman and his staff acknowledge the mistakes of the past and learn from their instructive lessons, the future of APAC Hands seems bright.

Finalizing Culture and Strategy

Culture is an essential piece of strategy. However, neither culture nor strategy can be corralled by a single universal definition and neither will lead to victory on their own accord. However, if the U.S. does not have a strategy that integrates and accounts for the culture of the foreign environment or its people, victory is likely unattainable. Ideally, implementing a Hands-like program in a Phase Zero environment will allow the U.S. to understand and sympathize with foreign cultures and engage with them in ways to prevent conflict through mutual respect and partnership. However, if conflict is inevitable, Clausewitz’s statement holds true: “The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to

¹⁴ Rosen, *Winning the next War Innovation and the Modern Military*, 105.

¹⁵ Rosen, *Winning the next War Innovation and the Modern Military*, 252.

establish...the kind of war on which they are embarking.”¹⁶ There is no better way to understand the motives of people than to be engaged in their culture and ultimately understand it from the inside looking out and not from an outsider’s confused view when peering into a foreign land from afar, especially after conflict has started.

The Hands program is a notable approach to the integration of culture into strategy, and it should receive the highest regard in future regional planning sessions. The following story, told by Farzana Marie, highlights the connection of culture and strategy: “A be-loved and well respected civil society leader, Dr. Mohammad Saeed Niazi once told us, ‘The hearts of the people are for sale—but not for money.’ Genuine caring, respect, and service ‘buy’ hearts; and those hearts freely offer the legitimacy governments embroiled in counterinsurgency so crave.”¹⁷ At the heart of the story is a relevant lesson for the military planner and decision maker alike, that one cannot know the price or the proper currency of the people unless he or she is truly in-tune with their culture. Marie continued: “A visionary, winning strategy in Afghanistan is in reach; it must be one that recognizes the nature and high stakes of the conflict, focuses on the pivotal importance of the human, psychological dimension, and embraces a humble supportive role through listening to Afghan counterparts.”¹⁸ The AfPak Hands program is enabled through a proficiency in LREC, but it still has a lot of work to do in Afghanistan. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani recently stated, “Afghanistan is the front-line. Because of American engagement in Afghanistan there have not been attacks on the mainland U.S., but let us not forget that fortresses cannot be built out of countries or continents. We are living in an interconnected world and our security is joined together.”¹⁹

The U.S. will continue to extend its borders outwards artificially by pushing national security abroad—the Asia-Pacific is the next area of strategic interest. By institutionalizing the lessons of the past, the APAC Hands program can capitalize on AfPak’s mistakes as well as its successes. The United States is at the crossroads; we

¹⁶ Clausewitz, *On War*, 88; Marie, *Hearts for Sale!*, 7.

¹⁷ Marie, *Hearts for Sale!*, 33-34

¹⁸ Marie, *Hearts for Sale!*, 103.

¹⁹ President Ashraf Ghani, “Afghan President Visits the White House: Press Conference,” *White House Press Conference* (Washington, D.C.: CNN, March 24, 2015).

must build the right program, recruit the right people and employ them to the right region—that is the recipe for APAC Hands’ success.



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